




# DIAMOND DICK

JR.    JR.

BOYS BEST WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.

No. 558

NEW YORK, JUNE 22, 1907.

Price, Five Cents

## DIAMOND DICK'S DYNAMITE VICTORY

OR  
THE ANARCHIST PLOT AT POCONO  
BY THE AUTHOR  
OF "DIAMOND DICK"



"Hold those rascals until I get rid of this dynamite!" shouted Dick. "Then I'll lend you a hand."



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# Diamond Dick's Dynamite Victory;

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## THE ANARCHIST PLOT AT POCOMO.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### MARKED BY THE BLACK HAND.

"Stilettoes!"

There was the loud ring of steel, as twenty gleaming blades clashed together.

It was a low-roofed, spacious room in an Italian boarding-house on the outskirts of Pocomo, New Mexico.

The apartment was really a hall, for it extended over the dining-room, kitchen and bedroom on the lower floor, and at night afforded plenty of room for the score of railroad laborers to sleep in, without their being overcrowded.

Little furniture was in the room, consisting principally of mattresses which served for beds ordinarily, but were now piled against the walls, so that they could be used as seats, to eke out the few stools.

Four windows gave light in the daytime, but they were closely shuttered, the only illumination coming from two coal-oil lamps, with reflectors, at opposite ends of the room.

At the door, locked and bolted, stood a masked man, with drawn stiletto, on guard.

Anyone who could have peeped in would have known that it was a meeting of an Italian secret society.

The men wore the ordinary rough dress of laborers, relieved slightly by the dandyism of the plains, in the way of broad-brimmed soft hats and bright-colored handkerchiefs at their throats, while in every belt hung a six-shooter, as well as the scabbard of the favorite Italian dagger—the long, keen stiletto.

That the proceedings were of the most secret nature was suggested by the fact that every man present had concealed his face with a black crape mask, which hung below the chin.

At the head of the room, his left hand holding a gavel, which rested on a small table, was a tall man, whose eyes, gleaming through the holes in his mask, seemed to flash fire.

It was he who had just uttered the word "Stilettoes!" in a harsh guttural that seemed to match the evil eyes. "Back!" he croaked.

The stilettoes, which had been held aloft in a bristling sheaf of murderous spikes, as the twenty men crowded together in front of the tall leader, leaped back like poisonous snakes.

"Twice!"

For the second time, at the word of command from the leader, the daggers struck fire noisily as they met.



"Thrice!"

The action was repeated, and then the leader, stretching forth his bared right arm, and holding his own stiletto point upward, allowed the other weapons to prick his flesh, so that a score of tiny red spots appeared.

"I am Vittorio!" went on the leader, as he waved his followers back and struck the gavel upon the table for order. "Mario and Fazio, apply the test, to make sure that we all are members of the Black Hand."

Of course these orders, like all the rest of the proceedings, were in the Italian tongue.

Two of the men stepped forth from the line and looked at the face of each of the personages in the room, lifting up the masks one by one, and replacing them immediately, as the inspection was finished in each case.

The guard at the door was the last person examined.

He was a lithe, well-built young man, with long, black curly hair and a heavy mustache, under which could be seen two rows of perfect white teeth when he smiled in the faces of the two inspectors.

"You are Gordio?" asked Mario. "I have never seen you before."

"Yes. I am working on the Pocomo railroad with you all. My number is Twenty-seven."

"It is well," put in Fazio. "Put on your mask again."

Gordio replaced his black mask, and resumed his station at the door composedly.

As Mario and Fazio stepped up to the table, where the tall leader, who had called himself Vittorio, was sitting in a wooden arm-chair, waiting for the report, while the other masked men, sprawling on mattresses or sitting on stools, having replaced their stilettos in their scabbards, Vittorio arose and nodded gravely in response to the report that all was well.

"The brand of fate has been placed on three persons, comrades," announced the leader, speaking rapidly, like one who wished to make his sentiments known as soon as possible. "The Black Hand will descend upon them, secretly and swiftly. It is written in blood, and the edict will be carried out. In due time the vengeance of the society will be executed, and then we will all go to the other side of the Rio Grande, where we shall be safe."

A mutter went through the assembly as if the statement of Vittorio gave general satisfaction.

"What is to be done?" asked Gordio, at the door. "You have not told us the names of those who are to be removed."

"All in good time, my Gordio," snarled Vittorio, angry at the interruption.

"Well, if I have to be one of the avengers, I want to know," persisted Gordio, whose speech, in the purest Italian, suggested that he was better educated than most of the men present.

"You shall know, Twenty-seven. But you must not

presume. The Black Hand moves in its own way. As a member, you should know that."

Gordio did not reply, but he gazed steadfastly at Vittorio, waiting for the next words from the leader.

"There has been injury done to all of us by the president of the railroad, who is known as Diamond Dick, and by two others, called Handsome Harry and William Doolittle," croaked Vittorio, after a pause. "They will die but it must seem to be an accident. You all understand?"

"We all understand," replied the others in chorus, and Gordio's voice was as loud and clear as anybody's.

"We will wait until to-morrow, when we have our week's pay in our pockets, before moving," continued Vittorio. "Then, it will be at the bridge near One Man Gorge. We will blow up the bridge when the three are upon it, and it will give us great sorrow. You understand?"

Vittorio chuckled malevolently, and there was a chorus of similar chuckles, as the members of the Black Hand in the room all joined in the words, "We understand," with Gordio's voice again the loudest and most distinct.

"That will be at sundown, eh?" asked Gordio.

"Yes."

Vittorio answered quickly, and immediately showed that he regretted his precipitation by stammering something to the effect that he did not know certainly, and that there might be a change of plan.

But Gordio did not wait to hear this, for, beckoning to one of the men nearest to him, he whispered to him to mind the door, and slipped outside.

There was nothing unusual in this, because it was the custom of the Black Hand members to leave their meetings one by one, so that they should not be suspected of gathering for illegal purposes, and Vittorio made no comment, save to warn the new doorkeeper, who happened to be Fazio, to watch the door closely.

No sooner was Gordio outside the door than he slipped down the dark staircase and out to the street, where he hastily threw off the black curly wig and black mask following this by removing the black mustache.

"Hully chee, Dick! Is dat youse?" asked a cautious voice close by, as a sturdy lad in the costume of a cowboy stole out of the shadows and revealed himself as Billy Doo.

Billy Doo—whose proper name was William Doolittle—was about fifteen, and he was proud of being the pard of Diamond Dick, president of the Pocomo Railroad, and one of the best-known scouts and enemies of evil-doers that the West had ever known.

Gordia did not reply immediately, but, having removed his mustache, wig and mask, threw off some of the rough clothing that had concealed his usual costume, and stood forth revealed as—Diamond Dick!

Dick's long yellow hair streamed over his shoulders,



and his white "Stetson" hat, which he had left outside the hall, into which he had contrived to make his way as a supposed member of the Black Hand Society, was now placed carelessly upon the back of his head, while his neat outing shirt and buckskin "chaps" were much more becoming than the dingy garments he had worn over them in the hall.

"Hush, Billy," whispered Dick, as soon as he had rid himself of his disguise. "I have learned all about their intentions. They are going to try to blow up the bridge near One Man Gorge to-morrow, at sundown, or a little afterward, and they will try to get you, Handsome Harry and me, all three together. Neat scheme, isn't it?"

The two pards had walked swiftly along the deserted street of Pocomo, and were nearly opposite the Howling Coyote saloon, which was lighted up and noisy, as it was very often at this time of the evening, past ten o'clock.

They vanished into the dark doorway of a grocery which was closed for the night, so far as doing business was concerned, but the door of which was open for the benefit of the boarding-house in the rear.

"Where is Handsome Harry?" asked Dick, as he and the boy found themselves in the dark grocery.

"Over dere in de Howlin' Coyote, tryin' ter find out somepin' 'bout dis here conspiracy agin' youse by de dagos," replied Billy. "I'll go and bring him out."

"No. You go back into the kitchen and tell Mrs. Crutcher to have some supper ready for me, and I will go to the Howling Coyote myself," replied Dick absently.

"Dat's all right, Dick. But youse wants ter keep yer lamps trimmed fer dese Black Hand guys. Dey's gittin' purty gay dese times," replied Billy Doo, as Dick went out.

Dick realized that he was in for considerable trouble, for the Italians who had been working on his railroad had been seen in close confab with others of their race who had dropped into this lively cattle and railroad town, ostensibly looking for work, but not seeming to be much distressed when they did not find it.

Diamond Dick was not inclined to wait for an explosion to blow him up, but determined to discover what really was going on, and he had been fortunate enough, with the aid of a disguise, to get into the secret councils of the Black Hand this night and learn that he and his two pards were marked as victims of the organization, although he did not exactly comprehend why.

"I'll talk it over with the Sarpint," thought Dick, referring to Handsome Harry, who was sometimes called the Old Sarpint of Siskiyou, from his having come originally from Siskiyou, in California.

Dick was in the middle of the dark street, on his way to the Howling Coyote, when a sound behind him sent his right hand like lightning to the six-shooter in his belt.

But before he could draw the weapon a heavy blanket

was thrown over his head, and he felt that several men, one of whom held his pistol-hand firmly to his side, were running him along the street, a helpless prisoner.

He felt himself pushed into a house, almost stumbling over the step, and then he was hustled up a staircase.

A door opened and, as he was shoved forward, it closed, and he detected the sound of bolts shooting into place.

Then the blanket was removed from his head, although the men holding him did not relinquish their grasp.

Coming out of the darkness, and having been forced into still blacker darkness under the blanket, Diamond Dick could not at first distinguish where he was, for a strong light, in front of a reflector, was directed straight at him.

But his eyes soon became accustomed to the glare, and, with a slight quickening of his pulses, as he felt that there were exciting times ahead for him, he saw that he was once more in the meeting-room of the Black Hand, with Vittorio, in his black mask, gazing at him evilly through the eye-holes.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE BIG CHEST.

Diamond Dick believed at once that he had either been followed by some one from the room, or had been seen by some Black Hand member outside when he threw off his disguise and went to the grocery with Billy Doo.

But the first words of Vittorio caused him to think differently.

"Diamond Dick," began the masked chief of the Black Hand gathering, "we have brought you into our council to give you the choice between rendering yourself responsible to our great organization, with punishment to follow, and granting to your men employed on the railroad certain rights that they demand and will have."

Vittorio spoke in Italian, but he knew Diamond Dick was a master of the tongue, and he waited for Dick's answer, without attempting to translate his speech into English.

"Do you suppose that anything can be got from me by such methods as this—attacking me in the public street and dragging me here to listen to your absurd talk?" replied Dick scornfully, in Italian.

"It was the only way to secure your presence here. We do what we can," croaked Vittorio. "We had not seen you since the morning, but our men were instructed to bring you here as soon as they came across you. They saw you crossing the street just now, in the darkness, and they obeyed orders by asking you to come to our meeting."

There was no mistaking the irony in Vittorio's tones when he spoke of Dick being "asked" to come, but Dick did not mind that now that he was sure he was not sus-



pected of being the Gordio who had so lately guarded the door in the secret meeting.

"What is the object in making me come here?" demanded Dick.

"To ask you whether you will raise wages a dollar a day all around, and to put to work several of my countrymen who are looking for employment."

"Such requests are ridiculous," replied Dick. "Railroads do not raise wages without proper consideration, nor does the manager of a road take on as employees a number of men he does not require."

"You refuse, then?"

"I do, most emphatically," replied Dick.

"Then the Black Hand will know what to do. The chest!"

Three men were holding Dick behind, and now two more advanced and took away his pistol, which they carefully emptied of its cartridges, one of them then searching him to make sure he had no more cartridges about him, after depriving him of half a dozen they found in one of his pockets.

The pistol was put back into its holster, and Dick understood that the reason of this was to prevent the masked men being identified later as his assailants by being in possession of his revolver.

He knew the ways of the Black Hand well enough to be aware that the organization was guided by cunning brains, and that even in a distant place like Pocomo, among the mountains of New Mexico, there were leaders who guarded its interests carefully.

When Vittorio gave his brief order, "The chest!" two of the masked individuals brought from behind a heap of mattresses a large box, nearly six feet in length, but not very wide or deep, and placed it upon the floor in front of the leader.

Diamond Dick could not suppress a shudder as he noted how much this chest resembled a coffin.

It was really a tool-box, belonging to some of the Italians, who were blacksmiths and carpenters, as well as merely wielders of the spade and pick.

Before Dick could make any effective resistance, he had been thrown down suddenly, and was lying flat in the long box, with the lid fastened over him.

He did not suffer from lack of air, because there were a number of holes bored in the lid, which not only afforded ventilation, but also permitted light to stream through.

Dick was not tied, but he found, when he tried to push up the lid, that it was securely fastened, and it gave him a feeling of helplessness which was not usual to him.

Lying upon his back, with the lid so closely pressed down upon him, that he could not have turned over if he had tried ever so hard, he was lifted, box and all, and carried down the stairs, as he could tell by the feel.

The meeting of the Black Hand seemed to have come

to a sudden end, and it was obviously the purpose of the members to dispose of him in some way without waiting till the next day, as Vittorio had said they would.

"We will carry this to One Man Gorge bridge," he heard Vittorio croak, in low tones. "Then we will get the money he has in his room, and pay ourselves the wages we ought to have. I don't think Diamond Dick will be in this world to object."

A chuckle by the leader was joined in by others, among whom Dick was sure he could make out, by their voices, Mario and Fazio.

It was clear to Dick that the rascals would take him to the place they had mentioned in their secret meeting—the bridge near One Man Gorge—where they would destroy him by dynamite, together with his pards, leading the other people in Pocomo to believe that it was an accident.

There was a great deal of dynamite used in blasting the rock away, to make room for a short branch road which was building under Dick's supervision, and it was not an uncommon thing for dynamite to "let go" accidentally, from one cause or another.

That the Black Hand had a strong motive in putting him and his pards out of the way he knew too well, for it had come in the line of his duty as United States marshal to punish several Black Hand men for outrages of various kinds, including murder and robbery.

Diamond Dick had discovered, long before, that the Black Hand does not confine its membership to Italians, but will take in rascals of any nationality, so long as they will subscribe to the oath of the society.

The consequence was that many "bad men" who had come into conflict with Dick at various times were in the Black Hand, and he well knew that they would not hesitate to assist in putting him out of the way, if they could do it in safety.

As he reached the bottom of the stairs—as he could tell by the motion—Vittorio gruffly ordered the persons carrying the chest to take it to the back door.

A few more steps, and then—down went the chest to the floor with a bang, and he could hear the sounds of fierce conflict, amid which he made out the voices of friends.

"Wow! Down wi' 'em! Chuck them thar dagos over on thar heads! What's my pard, Di'mon' Dick? I'm ther Ol' Sarpint o' Siskiyoun, wi' seventeen rattles an' a button, and my fangs is out fer ev'rything or'nary, 'speshally dagos! Wough-h-h-h!"

Dick knew that the speaker could be none other than his old pard, Handsome Harry, and he shouted with all his might:

"Sarpint! Break open this chest!"

"Hully chee!" responded the squeak of Billy Doo. "Dey's got him in dat box! Wot youse doin', Sarp? Why don't youse bust it open?"



The racket was terrific, and Dick could hear the sound of blows mingling with the scuffling of heavily-shod feet, but no explosion of firearms, strange to say.

There was thumping and bumping, mingled with low-voiced Italian oaths, while over all rang the yells of Handsome Harry and Billy Doo, giving utterance to characteristic exclamations, as they laid about them right joyously.

All this Diamond Dick knew only by the sounds, for he was still lying in his chest, waiting for Billy to get at him.

In another instant a pickax pried open the lid, and then, as the wooden cover fell off, a door opened at the back of the narrow hall, part of the space of which was taken up by the staircase, and Dick found himself looking into a small bedroom in which was a strong light from a lamp and reflector of the usual Pocomo type.

Handsome Harry—a big, broad-shouldered, good-humored-looking cattleman—had seized Dick's right hand in a warm grasp and pulled him to his feet with a jerk.

There was no one else to be seen except Billy Doo and the landlord of the boarding-house, an Italian named Salvadore, who was rubbing his eyes, as if he had just got out of bed.

"Quick! The back door!" shouted Dick, who had heard the order given by Vittorio.

"Dat's wot!" responded Billy. "De hull push went out dat way jest ez I got de lid off dat box! Come on!"

Billy Doo went first and hurled himself against a door at the end of the hall, by the side of the bedroom, which led to the open plain at the back of the house.

The door was fastened, and it took a few moments to get it open.

When this was at last done, and the pards gazed out into the darkness, nothing was to be seen, and the only sound was the sighing of the night-wind from the distant mountains.

"Whut's ther play, Dick?" asked Handsome Harry, as he pushed Billy aside and stepped outside.

A stone came flying out of the blackness, striking the Sarpint upon the chest hard enough to draw forth an involuntary grunt.

"Dat's de answer, Sarp!" squeaked Billy Doo.

### CHAPTER III.

#### SERIOUS BUSINESS.

Handsome Harry was a fine-looking fellow. His jolly red face was partly concealed by an immense brick-colored beard, while his long hair, of the same hue, hung over his shoulders in the careless way affected by Westerners who spend their lives chiefly on the plains and in the mountains.

He was six feet four inches in his big boots, which

with his red flannel shirt, open at the throat, the sleeves rolled up to his elbows, and the loosely-knotted neck handkerchief, were all part of a mighty and picturesque personality.

"Dick, I'm shore goin' ter foller ther spo't whut fired thet rock at me an' round him up fer punishment," declared Handsome Harry, as he darted away into the darkness.

"Come back, Harry!" shouted Dick.

"Git over here, yer big slob!" added Billy Doo, endeavoring to make out the form of his big pard.

"Wow! Git back thar, both o' yer!" roared Handsome Harry's voice. "These hyar mavericks is ready ter fight yer wi' dynamite! Thar's more'n twenty in ther herd, too!"

As if to prove the truth of his words, there was a tremendous explosion some distance from the house, producing a shower of stones and earth, which flew all about Dick and Billy Doo.

"Come inside!" directed Diamond Dick quietly, pulling the reluctant Billy into the hallway.

"Wot? Leave de Sarp ter scrap wit' dem mugs all by his lonesome," protested Billy. "Dat don't seem ter be no squar' deal, Dick. Let's go out an' git inter deir hair while we kin."

"No, Billy! We shall go after them soon. But there would be no sense in attacking them now. They have dynamite, and they are desperate enough to do anything."

"Mebbe dat blow-up jest now got de Sarp," suggested Billy, in nervous tones. "It come f'um dat direction."

"Wow! I'm ther Ol' Sarpint o'——" interrupted Handsome Harry's voice, at a considerable distance, but his speech was shut off suddenly, as if a hand had been clapped over his mouth.

"You see, he is all right," observed Dick, in a tone of relief which suggested that he had not been quite so well satisfied on the point until he heard his gigantic pard's voice.

"Wot air youse goin' ter do, Dick?" asked Billy.

"Keep quiet till we get out of this house," answered Dick, as he saw that the boarding-house keeper, Salvadore, was listening to them, evidently understanding all that they said, notwithstanding that they talked in English, a language the wily Italian pretended he could not speak or comprehend.

As they left the boarding-house, after seeing Salvadore, who professed to know nothing about the doings of his boarders, shut the door, Dick went over to Mrs. Crutcher's boarding-house for the supper he had ordered half an hour before.

"Dey can't feaze youse much, Dick," remarked Billy Doo, admiringly. "I t'ought dey wuz goin' ter put youse all ter de bad fer a while, afore I tumbled dat youse wuz



in dat box. Even at dat, it wuzn't no picnic fer youse, and I'm glad ter see dat youse hez a appetite still."

Dick was coolly seated at a table in the dining-room, where Mrs. Crutcher, a round-faced woman with black eyes, in her early forties, had prepared a savory steak and potatoes, with plenty of gravy for him.

Mrs. Crutcher was a sharp-tempered lady to some persons, especially to her husband, but Diamond Dick was a favorite of hers, and she always took care that he should be well served in her house.

"I am working out a plan of campaign," responded Dick to Billy. "That explosion just now was merely to give us a hint that they would use dynamite if they considered it necessary. It was a very small piece that they let off, or it would have done damage. It does not take much dynamite to make a noise like that, you know."

"It sounded to me like a ton," remarked Billy.

"But, in reality," laughed Dick, "it was a morsel about as large as a hickory-nut, I should say."

Dick calmly disposed of his meal, Billy sitting on the opposite side of the table, watching him and wondering how he could be so cool after such an evening as he had spent, when there came a rather peculiar interruption.

A man came whirling into the doorway, and falling flat upon his stomach on the long dining-room table, went skating along it in that attitude till his chin hung over the other end, while one of his feet kicked over a bowl of stewed prunes and the other sent a large tomato flying backward from its dish like a cannon-ball.

"Hully punkins! Wot's dis?" squeaked Billy, jumping from his chair.

The tomato which the man on the table had kicked from the dish had been stopped by the face of Mrs. Crutcher, who had pursued him into the room, and the ripe redness of the fruit had plastered her features so thoroughly that she was temporarily blind and speechless.

Diamond Dick had pushed his chair back, to be out of the way of the man's flying heels, for he recognized the owner of the heels as Simon Crutcher, and he knew that that unhappy gentleman had been in a controversy with his better half.

Mrs. Crutcher wielded a large soup-ladle, the dents in which testified to its having been used as a weapon of offence and defense, and possibly as an implement of chastisement.

In fact, she had just landed a good hard crack on Simon Crutcher's head when he bounded away, and, in endeavoring to escape her wrath, had come into collision with the table and performed his involuntary tobogganing feat from end to end.

"Look out, Dick!" whispered Simon, as he finished his performance by turning a somersault off the end of the table and falling in a heap at Dick's feet.

"What is it, Simon?" asked Dick, in a low tone.

"Ther dagos!"

"What about them?"

"They air over at yer office."

"What?" shouted Dick, jumping to his feet. "Come on, Billy?"

"Wot is it?" asked Billy, bewildered, for he had not heard the whispered conversation between Dick and Simon Crutcher, although he knew they had been talking earnestly about something.

Billy Doo did not hesitate because he did not know what was in the wind, however, being quite satisfied that Dick would not have given an order without good reason.

Simon Crutcher considered discretion the better part of valor in his present situation, and he was slowly and cautiously making his way around the room on his hands and knees, so that his head should be below the level of the table, where he would be concealed from the gracious eyes of Mrs. Crutcher.

But his caution was useless.

The good lady had wiped the smashed tomato from her countenance with her apron, and was gazing about for Simon.

She caught sight of that unlucky individual just as he was about to bolt out of the door after Diamond Dick and Billy Doo.

He was too far away to be reached easily with the soup-ladle, and she looked about for another weapon.

An inspiration came to her, and she swung a rocking-chair by her side right under the feet of Simon, so that he tumbled over it head first. Then, before he could recover himself, Mrs. Crutcher was upon him with the soup-ladle, belaboring him with her customary heartiness.

"You'll come in hyar, sp'ilin' my boarders' supper, will yer?" she demanded fiercely, as she fetched Simon a welt with the ladle that made him yelp.

"I had bizness wi' him, Matilda," pleaded Simon, trying to ward off the vengeful soup-ladle with one hand, while, with the other, he strove to push his wife away, so that he could escape.

"Bizness?" she cried, in accents of the deepest scorn. "Whut bizness hev you wi' any one, yer worthless, lazy coyote? Why did I ever marry you? Oh, why did I do it?"

"Thet's whut I want ter know?" muttered Simon Crutcher.

A crack on the head for Simon with the soup-ladle warned him that his lady had overheard his remark.

He did not wait for anything more, but, dexterously swinging the rocking-chair aside, so that it got in the way of his fair wife, he ran out of the house and almost knocked over Billy Doo in his headlong haste.

"Aw! Cheese it! Wot's de matter wit'——" began Billy Doo. Then, recognizing Simon by his loud breath-



ing, for it was too dark to make out his form and features, he asked: "Wot's all dis about de dagos, Crutcher? I gives it ter yer straight, right off de bat, dat I'm gitting looney over all de t'ings wot's happenin' in dis burg ter-night, 'specially wit' de way de Sarp hez cut loose."

"Thar ain't no reason fer yer ter go pesterin' yerself about ther Sarp, Billy," rejoined Crutcher. "Whar is de ol' spo't, anyhow?"

In a few words Billy told Simon that Handsome Harry had departed with a lot of Italians from Salvadore's boarding-house, and that he seemed to be unable to get away from them.

Simon Crutcher's response was a loud, scornful laugh.

The idea of any one getting the best of Handsome Harry—especially a gang of Black Handers—struck Simon as so ridiculous that he could not help giving way to uproarious mirth.

"Yer don't need ter go worryin' 'bout thet thar, Billy," declared Mr. Crutcher confidently. "Them thar Black Hand gents won't do up ther Sarpint in a way thet mought bring it home ter 'em. They ain't swingin' thar loop thet way. They air too cunnin' a lot o' wolves fer thet."

Crutcher and Billy Doo had been walking swiftly in the direction of the station building of the Pocomo and Skiplap Railroad, of which Diamond Dick was president and general manager, and where he had his private office on the second floor.

Diamond Dick had gone ahead, in response to Simon Crutcher's statement that the mutinous Italians had gone there.

"Got yer gun, Simon?" asked Billy.

"Shore! I don't usually go out fer a play like this hyar wi'out my tools, 'specially when I hez cause ter believe thar's goin' ter be a scrap. I reckons you air fixed all right."

"Trust yer Uncle Billy!" replied Billy Doo, with a short laugh. "I on'y want a chancet ter plug one o' these here Romans. It's a cinch he won't want no more o' my game."

They had reached the wide gateway leading to the railroad yard, and Billy was about to enter cautiously, keeping in the shadow, in response to the advice of Simon Crutcher, when there was a fusillade of revolver shots, and the shouting of many voices, among which Billy could distinguish that of Diamond Dick.

"Come on, Simon!" yelled Billy. "Dere's Dick givin' dem guys Hail Columbia! Gee! Dis is de time we takes de pot! Whee!"

The uproar in the railroad yard waxed louder, as Billy and Simon rushed in, only to meet Dick at the foot of the staircase leading to his office coming forth hurriedly, revolver in hand, while a group of his railroad employees, engineers, firemen and brakemen gathered about him.

"Wot is it, Dick?" asked Billy.

"The rascals have got away with fifty thousand dollars! That's all!"

"But one on 'em won't spend none of it," interjected a burly engineer named Tom Curtis grimly. "I got him right whar it hurt. Look hyar!"

At Tom Curtis' feet lay a masked man, stone dead, with a bullet through his heart!

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### PADLOCKED!

"There is only one thing to do, Billy," remarked Dick, ten minutes later, as he stood in front of his dismantled desk, and convinced himself that the money really had been stolen from the iron-lined secret compartment which he used as a safe. "We will go to One Man Gorge and catch them unawares."

"Jest you an' me?" asked Billy Doo.

"An' me!" added Simon Crutcher.

"An' me!" put in another voice, at sound of which Simon dropped his air of bravery and tried to hide behind Dick.

It was the voice of Mrs. Crutcher, and she stood glaring at her husband with a ferocity that caused him to shake with apprehension.

"Yes, my dear!" murmured Simon Crutcher humbly. "Anything you wants ter do shore hez ter be did, an' ef yer wants ter come, I'm quite willin', I'm shore."

Mrs. Crutcher sniffed contemptuously.

"As ef it would mek any diff'rence ter me whether you air willin' or not, Simon Crutcher," she snapped. "Ther thing is right hyar, Di'mon' Dick," she continued, addressing Dick. "I heerd somethin' 'bout a conspiracy ter use thet thar dynamite whut yer hev stored up thar near One Man Gorge, an' I jest went over ter Salvadore's house ter-night an' skeered him inter a confession."

"You did?" asked Dick eagerly. "What did he say?"

"He told me thet thar wuz a job on foot ter do up Di'mon' Dick, an' thet he wuz sorry fer it."

"Why was he sorry?"

"Jest 'cause Salvadore wants ter keep on runnin' his boardin'-house fer his own countrymen in Pocomo, an' he's afeard thet some o' these hyar Black Hand spo'ts will git too numerous in thar ways, an' you'll be wantin' ter fire out ther ol' caboodle. Thet's why."

Dick nodded understandingly.

"I see," he murmured, "it's natural enough. Did you hear anything about the determination to break into my office and steal the money, Mrs. Crutcher?"

"Not any. Ef I hed, don't yer think I'd shore hev conveyed ther information ter you? This hyar no-account husband o' mine got on ter it somehow, but in co'se he c'u'dn't tell yer 'bout it till it wuz too late."



"I told him ez soon ez I c'u'd, Matilda," protested Simon, in an aggrieved tone. "You allers mek so much fuss ef he's disturbed at his meals, thet I wuz waitin' till he got through."

"Yah!" snarled Mrs. Crutcher.

It was quite true that she had threatened all kinds of punishment to Simon if he dared do anything to interfere with Diamond Dick's quiet enjoyment of his supper, but she would not confess it, because she made it a point never to admit that she was wrong—especially to her husband.

Diamond Dick would have preferred to go to One Man Gorge without the company of Mrs. Crutcher, but as that good lady had expressed her intention of accompanying the party, there was nothing to be said.

It would not have been good policy to enlist the aid of the railroad employees in running down the Black Hand rioters, for Dick did not know how far the mutinous spirit had spread, and he was afraid of traitors.

As a rule, the men at work on the railroad were all faithful to its interests, and all except some of the rascals who had been punished for evil doings were warm friends of the young president.

But the Black Hand is an insidious power, and Dick did not know what traitors there might be even among his supposedly most loyal employees.

When he got down to the yard again, he found that the body of the dead Italian had been removed to the baggage room, to await the action of the coroner, and he learned also that the man was a stranger to all who had seen the dead face.

"One of the new men who came into town lately," observed Dick, as he contemplated the calm features of the corpse.

"Shore!" added Mrs. Crutcher. "I remember him. He come ter my house fer bo'd, thinkin' I wuz Salvadore, an' I chased him out wi' my soup-ladle."

"I'll bet a stack o' blues he beat it quick," commented Simon Crutcher, sotto voce.

"Air we goin' ter walk, Dick?" asked Billy.

"Yes. It is not more than three miles, and I am afraid if we took our horses, we should be ambushed."

"Dat's right, too," agreed Billy, as he dropped into a trot, that was his favorite gait when on a trail on foot.

It was pitch dark, and as Dick led his little party toward the wild region of One Man Gorge, the four stole along like spectres.

Dick did not keep to the line of the railroad, which wound around a huge rock not far from town, but cut off a corner by striking across the plain to the left.

One Man Gorge was near the foot of a mountain, and the bridge over One Man River was a wooden structure of considerable strength, as was necessary, considering that very heavy trains passed over it daily.

The river was high just now, for there had been copious

rains not long before, and the mountains were still feeding the streams in the valleys in torrents.

"Dey's a cabin up dere in de rocks," muttered Billy to Dick. "Don't youse t'ink de dagos is up dere?"

"Hardly likely, Billy. They know that I am pretty sure to look there, and they do not know how large a force I have with me."

"Unless thar's spies," suggested Simon.

There was a sharp crack—or, rather, smack—as if some one had had a box on the ear, followed by a smothered exclamation of pain from Simon.

"You keep yer jaw shet, will yer?" demanded Mrs. Crutcher, in an awful whisper, and Billy and Dick both knew that the good lady had fetched Simon a swipe.

Cautiously, Dick made his way to the cabin in the darkness, telling the others to remain down on the railroad.

The cabin was all in darkness, and Dick found that the padlock outside the door had not been disturbed.

"I don't know about this," mused Dick.

The very fact of the padlock not having been disturbed made Dick suspicious, for there should have been a watchman in the cabin, and he was not likely to go in and fasten a padlock outside.

The cabin was empty during the day, but the watchman—none other than Dick's faithful colored man, Leander Johnson—was accustomed to go there at sundown and remain till the men went to work the next day.

Five hundred yards away, in a cave in the rocks, was a large wooden box, containing some fifty sticks of dynamite; and it was Leander Johnson's duty to watch this dynamite, as well as the railroad.

The cave was really partly a house, for the top of it, which was open to the sky, had been roofed in roughly with wood, and an extension had been built in front, with a door, padlocked like the cabin.

Dick quietly opened the cabin door—for he carried a duplicate key to that in the possession of Leander—and went inside.

Turning on the pocket electric lamp, he soon satisfied himself that the place was empty, and was about to go out, when he found himself opposed by some one who, without more ado, sought to throw him down upon his back.

His unknown foe was no match for Diamond Dick, however, notwithstanding that he seemed to be a man of almost gigantic proportions.

But Dick had the agility and steel-like muscles of a young fellow who always kept himself in perfect training, and it was not long before he found that he was slowly forcing his big antagonist down, instead of dropping to the floor himself.

Doubtless Dick would have overcome his assailant easily had he been allowed a fair contest, for the quick



turns and skilful tugs of the young athlete were too much for the clumsy strength of the unknown.

But, just as Dick had forced the big man back so that he was bent almost at right-angles, and would have gone down upon his head in another instant, two pairs of hands caught Dick's wrists and hurled him to the floor so heavily that he became dazed for the time being.

"Confound those fellows!" exclaimed Dick, as he heard the door bang. "They must have been close by when I came into the cabin. It is a wonder they did not do for me before I came in."

That they were laborers he knew by the feel of their horny hands upon his wrists, and he could tell, from experience, that they were railroad laborers, used to the pick and spade, rather than to the riata of the cowboy. The hands of cowboys feel altogether different from those of ordinary laborers.

Springing to the door, as his brain recovered from the dizziness induced by the fall, Dick tried to force it open.

"Barred outside, of course," he muttered. "Or else they have fastened the hasp of the padlock with an iron spike."

The latter surmise was indeed the correct one, but that did not interest Dick so much as a whispered remark in Italian that came to him from the outside, as if some man were talking to another, without considering that they were near enough for Dick to overhear.

"We'll place the dynamite so that it will get all three of them at once, and we'll get the train, too!"

"The villains!" murmured Dick. "Who do they mean by the 'three of them,' I wonder. And what is that about the train?"

Then, as it came to him that Billy and Handsome Harry, with himself, must be the three, and that the conspirators meant to destroy the train at the same time, he pushed at the door with all his might to free himself from the log cabin.

The door seemed to be as firm as the mountain itself.

## CHAPTER V.

### RASCALS ON TOP.

As Dick sought to get out of the cabin, there was an interesting state of things outside, although it could not be said to be a pleasing one.

Billy Doo, in the hands of two masked men, was being pushed up a steep mountain path toward the cave where the fifty sticks of dynamite were stored, while Mr. and Mrs. Crutcher found themselves securely tied to a hand-car that was used by the workmen to get from one part of the railroad to another with tools and other light freight.

"Look hyar, Simon," exclaimed Mrs. Crutcher, when six men sprung upon them in the darkness, and she

found herself bound so tightly that the ropes cut into her arms cruelly. "This hyar's all your fault, an' I'll shore mek you suffer fer it when I git loose."

Simon Crutcher was in as unhappy a plight as his wife, and he did not answer for a minute.

Their captors were growling to each other in Italian, but, as that was a tongue which neither Mrs. Crutcher nor Simon understood, it meant nothing to them, save that it assured them of what they had supposed—that the persons concerned in the outrage were Italians, and members of the Black Hand, at that.

Of course, their suspicion of the men belonging to the Black Hand was nothing more than a suspicion to the Crutchers, because it is not the habit of that dread organization to allow the identity of any of its members to be known.

If Vittorio and his associates had had an inkling that Diamond Dick had been in their secret councils, disguised as Gordio, and that he had heard the plot arranged, his life would not have been worth a moment's purchase.

He would have been killed forthwith, regardless of the danger that such a murder would have meant to the slayers. As it was, he was to be kept until he could be disposed of as if by accident.

"Whut do you rascallions want?" demanded Mrs. Crutcher in English, indignantly.

"Shut up!" growled one of the Italians. "We not going to hurt you if you be quiet."

"You're a liar!" snapped the irate lady. "This hyar bizness o' puttin' a lariat around me ain't done fer my amoosement, I reckon. Get ther rops away, an' I'll soon show yer thet Matilda Crutcher kin keep her end up agin' any number o' men. All I wants is a squar' deal."

"Thet's wot," put in Simon.

"Shet up, you!" ordered Mrs. Crutcher.

Simon Crutcher conceived the idea that now, when his wife could not get at him, would be a good time for him to tell her what was in his mind, and he had just determined to tell her that he would not shut up, when she contrived to break loose from her bonds, and first letting drive with her rather powerful fists at the two Italians who had mounted the hand-car, with the intention of driving it up the railroad, she snatched the bowie from her husband's belt and cut his ropes.

"You'or'nary coyote! Git!" she whispered, as she pulled her husband away.

The darkness favored their escape, for, although the moon was rising behind the mountain, it had not yet got high enough to relieve the blackness of the valley.

They heard the Italians grumbling in their own tongue, and then followed the squeaking, grating and wheezing of the hand-car, as it was worked away, going



along the railroad toward the bridge, and thus assuring them that their captors were not pursuing them.

Billy Doo, meanwhile, was fighting with the men dragging him along, giving them his opinion in no uncertain terms, although, as he spoke in English, they affected not to comprehend him.

He could not see what his captors looked like, both on account of the darkness and because they wore long black masks over their faces, but he knew they were some of Vittorio's gang because of their muttered remarks in Italian from time to time.

"Wot air youse guys drivin' at?" demanded Billy.

No answer.

"Dis t'ing of shovin' a guy up de mountain whedder he wants to go or not ain't de kind o' treatment I'm used ter in de sassiety I moves in, ez a general roole," persisted Billy. "I'm due ter hand youse a paste in de snoot ez soon ez I gits de use o' me mitts ag'in, an' youse kin make up yer minds ter dat same at de earliest convenience."

Billy Doo might have said much more, but, just then, a door was pushed open and he was thrust forward against some one who uttered a loud grunt, the door closing with a bang.

"Hully chee! Wot's dis?" squeaked Billy.

"Hello, Billy!"

"Wot's dat? De Sarp?"

"Shorely it is. How did you git inter this hyar fix, Billy?" responded Handsome Harry.

"Back up, Sarp! Wot's de use o' askin' me dat? I come because I wanted ter pipe off de scenery, in co'se. Lend me yer opery-glass, won't youse?"

Billy Doo spoke in tones of withering scorn, and Handsome Harry felt uncomfortable because he had asked a question which could be answered in only one way.

"I begs yer pardon, Billy," he murmured humbly. "But thar ain't no need fer you to put on dog wi' yer ol' pard."

The tone touched Billy Doo's tender heart, and he felt for Handsome Harry's hand in the darkness, giving it a hearty squeeze and a hard shake.

"I reckon I'm too fresh, anyhow, Sarp," Billy confessed. "Wot is dis j'int we're in, anyhow?"

"It's ther dynamite magazine," answered Handsome Harry quietly.

"Wot?"

"Don't yell like thet thar, Billy," warned the Sarpint. "Ther concussion might set all this hyar stuff off. Thar's fifty sticks o' dynamite hyar, an' it's all jest a-quiv'rin' ter let go!"

"Gee!"

"Thet thar's a fact, Billy," Handsome Harry went on solemnly. "Yer savvy thet this dynamite is mighty ticklish stuff, allers on a ha'r-trigger-like. I've knowed

a ton o' it ter go up in ther air, an' deevastate three counties—men, cattle, shacks, grass, rocks, trees an' ther Constitootion o' ther U-nited States—all at one lick. Yer hev ter be plumb easy in yer talk an' movements whar dynamite is."

"Hully chee! I sh'u'd say so," agreed Billy Doo.

"Shore! Them thar dagos got me so tight I c'u'dn't git ter me gun till I wuz shet up in hyar."

"Thet's so. They didn't tek my gun away f'um me. I reckon they knowed it wuz a cinch I wouldn't use it," observed Billy.

"Not onless yer wanted ter land on ther other side o' ther river in a fragmentoory condition."

"Well, dat ain't no ambition o' mine, Sarp."

"Nor o' mine, nuther," responded Handsome Harry. "I hev my gun, with a cartridge in ev'ry one o' ther six chambers, but I wouldn't no more dare ter pull ther trigger in hyar than ef I wuz in church."

"How long hev yer been here, Sarp?"

"Sence them thar dagos brought me out o' ther town when we wuz outside o' Salvadore's, a while ago. They run me over ter ther railroad, and then got me on a hand-car. It didn't tek long ter churn up hyar."

"Hully snooks! Sarp! Why didn't youse land on deir maps wit' dem fists o' your'n, an' put 'em all on de frazzle?" broke in Billy impatiently. "Dey would have gone down like a row o' tenpins, an' youse would ha' covered yerse'f wit' glory."

"Waal, Billy, they didn't gi' me no show fer no sech play ez that," answered Handsome Harry regretfully. "Yer kin put down all yer chips an' be sure o' winnin', thet ef thar hed been an openin', by which I c'u'd hev carcoomvented them thar gents, they would all be spraddled over ther scenery long afore this, an' thet's whut-ever."

"Dat's all right, Sarp. I ain't got no doubt youse done de best yer c'u'd," agreed Billy. "Ef I'd been in your boots, I'd prob-bly ha' got away wit' dem. De question now is how's we goin' ter git away f'um dis coop wit'out bein' hoit."

"Shore! Thet's whut I say?" responded Handsome Harry, glad to change the conversation.

Billy Doo produced a small tin match-box and lighted a wax match, so that they could see what their surroundings were like.

They were not reassuring, for the boxes of dynamite piled on top of each other were the only seats that offered, and there was nothing else in the place except loose boulders.

The apartment, half cave and half wooden shack, was secured by the one solid door, and the roof was of heavy logs, through the interstices of which the rays of the rising moon forced their way fitfully.

"Gee! Dis looks ez ef we'd hev ter stay till some one let us out, Sarp," squeaked Billy dolefully.



"Thet's ther appearance o' things, shore," coincided Handsome Harry, who was fumbling out the dynamite boxes. "I see thet thar's no lids on these hyar boxes 'cept one."

"Wot's dat?"

"Ther boxes air cov'ed over wi' brown paper, Billy," replied the Sarpint, an' ef anythin' wuz ter drop on 'em they'd blow us all over inter Arizona or across ther Rio Grande."

"It looks like it," agreed Billy.

"Hush!" whispered Handsome Harry warningly, as he blew out the match in Billy Doo's hand.

Some one was on the roof, pushing one of the logs aside!

## CHAPTER VI.

### DICK FINDS THE WAY.

Diamond Dick did not give up hope of escaping from his narrow prison merely because the door was secured.

He knew that there were no windows, for the place had been built only for the storing of tools and the shelter of the watchman in case of bad weather, and all the light needed could be obtained by way of the door.

"I wish there was a pick or hammer here," muttered Dick, as his right hand rested upon the butt of his six-shooter, giving him some comfort. "I do not think it would be wise for me to shoot my way out. That would bring all the blackguards upon me together, and I suppose I should get a dig with a stiletto in the dark."

Dick knew the desperate character of the men with whom he had to deal, and did not attempt to disguise from himself that he was in a rather awkward situation.

While he had employed many Italians on the railroad since he had taken charge of it, and had found them generally decent fellows, who asked nothing more than the wages they earned and half-way considerate treatment, he realized that there were ruffians among them, as there are among a large crowd of men of any other nation, and he felt that he had got into the hands of some of the worst of them.

The evil accomplished by the Black Hand, the Mafia, the Camorra and other secret organizations, is known to all the world, and Diamond Dick had been uneasy ever since it had come to his knowledge that a group of Black Hand members were in Pocomo.

That they were simply anarchists he had been assured by some of his men in the roundhouse, and he did not flatter himself that he would overcome their machinations without difficulty.

That the Black Hand had signed his own death-warrant, as well as those of Handsome Harry and Billy Doo, he knew on the evidence of his own ears in the meeting in Salvadore's boarding-house which he had attended disguised as Gordio, and now there had been a robbery

of fifty thousand dollars from his private office, to complicate matters still more.

"I'm going to have that money back, and they shan't kill us, either," muttered Dick, between his teeth.

Diamond Dick's fighting blood was up now, and Vittorio would have to employ all his cunning and call upon all the courage he had, if he were to overcome Dick when he felt like that.

His first move toward releasing himself was to make sure that it was the hasp belonging to the padlock which was secured.

He shook the door and recognized from the sound that the padlock was hanging loosely in the hasps, but was not locked.

"If that is all, I reckon I'll soon get out," he thought, as he shook the door still harder.

The key of the padlock was in his pocket, for he had withdrawn it after unlocking the door, but the padlock itself he had left in the hasp, so that it would be possible for any one outside to take it out, and replace it after closing the door.

Dick shook and shook at the door, listening between each shake to determine, if possible, whether anybody was near, ready to attack him as soon as he should emerge.

All was quiet, and at last Dick had the satisfaction of hearing the padlock jingle as it fell upon the rocks outside.

Cautiously, revolver in hand, Dick pushed the door open and stepped outside, dropping to his hands and knees instantly, in case a lurking foe were waiting for him.

The moon was rising, and there was just enough light for him to see that he was alone, and that the railroad was apparently deserted also.

Then his quick eye caught something bulky and black near the bridge and on the track, and he soon made it out to be a hand-car.

"What business has that thing there?" he murmured. "There will be that midnight train from Crocker along here in less than an hour, if it is on time. It would be a nice thing if it ran into that hand-car."

Diamond Dick, with the instinct of a railroad man, hastened toward the hand-car, and his teetch clenched as he recognized the fact that it had been put there with the deliberate intention of wrecking the train.

"The scoundrels!" he exclaimed. "This plot is a bigger one than I suspected. Not content with stealing the money and arranging to murder us, the Black Hand has planned to smash this train, knowing that there is a passenger car attached."

It was easy enough to see through this intention on the part of the mutineers, for the hand-car could not have been put there for any other reason than to cause a collision.



With fiendish ingenuity, the miscreants had arranged some brushwood in such a way that it would conceal the car from the engineer of the oncoming train, while the trees which lined the track on either side cast shadows that would make it still more difficult for him to distinguish the obstruction.

Dick soon mounted the hand-car, as he could not lift it off the track single-handed, and ran it down to a switch, where it would be harmless.

"Some of those fellows may be on the lookout, ready to put it back when I go away," he told himself. "But I will spoil their game by not going away."

He made his way hastily toward the spot where he had left his two pards, with Mrs. Crutcher and Simon, but no one was there.

"It was not to be supposed they would be," he mused. "But I dare say they are within hearing. I will try them, anyhow."

He stepped into the thicket by the side of the track, not far away from the rocky path leading to the dynamite cave, and gave vent to the long wail of a coyote, such as is so often heard at nights on the plains and in the mountains of the West.

The imitation was perfect, and Dick was satisfied that if any stranger happened to hear it, he would suppose it really was one of the starved wolves who hang about places where men live in the nighttime, seeking some kind of food.

For a few minutes Dick listened for a response, but none came, and he repeated the cry.

He was startled by a very bad imitation of a coyote sounding within a dozen yards of him.

Had the wail been at all possible as that of the real animal, Dick might have supposed it was a coyote, and have waited for another reply to his own signal.

But this peculiar sound, half-squeak and half-yell undoubtedly came from a human throat.

The only question was whether it had been uttered by a friend or an enemy.

Dick determined that the most likely way to find this out would be to invite the unknown to repeat the signal, so he gave vent to another wail on his own account.

Again came that unconvincing coyote yell, and Dick, believing he recognized something in it that he had heard before, dropped to his hands and knees, and crawled cautiously across the railroad toward the brushwood on the other side.

As he reached a shrub which stood up from the surrounding brush, he was clasped in a pair of stout arms, and a feminine voice whispered:

"Look out, Dick! Ther woods is full o' them' thar varmints!"

It was Mrs. Crutcher!

"What is it all about?" asked Dick.

"Thar's all kinds o' things goin' on, Dick, an' ef we

ain't keerful, them Black Handers is goin' ter rub out Billy an' ther Sarpint, too. Both of 'em is up thar in the dynamite cave," interrupted Simon, who was crouched down by the side of his wife.

"Simon, I don't most usually 'low yer ter talk," observed Mrs. Crutcher patronizingly. "But it happens thet yer hev told ther solid trooth this hyar time, an' I reckon we'll hev ter pass over this breach of discipline. But don't butt in ag'in."

"No, Matilda," responded Simon humbly.

"Where are the Italians?" asked Dick.

"Ain't seen 'em fer nigh twenty minutes, Dick," replied Mrs. Crutcher.

"Where did you see them last?"

"Right thar wi' ther hand-car whut I seen you workin' down ther track a while ago."

"You saw me?"

"Shore! You come down f'um ther bridge right a-past Simon an' me, an' I shore reckon it wuz plumb lucky fer you thet it wuz me and not some o' them thar gents f'um Salvadore's. They'd hev plugged yer, mebbe," suggested Mrs. Crutcher.

"I don't think so," replied Dick carelessly. "If they had meant to shoot me they could have done it before."

"I don't see through thar play, nohow," interposed Simon.

"Shet ep!"

Mrs. Crutcher accompanied this command by a blow on the side of her husband's head, which sent him sprawling.

"I am going to get Billy and the Sarpint out of the cave," announced Dick, in a matter-of-course tone. "Will you come with me, Simon?"

"Shore!" responded Simon Crutcher, with alacrity.

"Not wi'out me," added Mrs. Crutcher. "I wouldn't trust yer away f'um me when thar's ez much goin' on ez thar seems ter be hyar. Yer'd git inter mischief afore yer'd been away f'um me three minutes."

"I reckon I've been on harder trails than this hyar wi'out doin' harm or making foolish cracks," grumbled Simon.

"I doubt it."

"Down!" whispered Dick hastily, as he pushed Simon Crutcher over with a vigorous shove.

"Whut's up?" asked Simon, more bewildered than ever.

At that instant, Vittorio, Fazio and Mario, all unmasked, came sauntering down the railroad track from the bridge.

## CHAPTER VII.

### SCOUTING INDIAN FASHION.

The Italians came down to a spot so near to Diamond Dick and his companions that it was possible to overhear their conversation.



As Dick was the only one of the trio that understood Italian, he had to tell Mrs. Crutcher and Simon afterward what had passed among Vittorio and his two fellow-scoundrels.

"You may as well go up to the shanty and see that Diamond Dick is all safe," growled Vittorio, as the three came within earshot.

"Who? I?" asked Fazio.

"Yes."

"I think it is waste of time," grumbled Fazio, who did not want the task of climbing up to the log cabin, which was some little distance above the railroad track.

Vittorio raised his hand with a fierce gesture, as Fazio's stiletto leaped from its sheath.

For an instant the two desperadoes stood facing each other, Vittorio's swarthy countenance drawn into a scornful smile, while Fazio's was distorted by rage.

Dick was rather pleased to see that the Black Handers were ready to quarrel among themselves, because it suggested that some of them might be willing to betray their comrades to save their own necks if he could contrive to corner them.

"Put up that knife, Fazio," said Vittorio dispassionately, after a pause, full of tensiety.

"Do you want me to go up to the cabin to see whether Diamond Dick is there?" asked Fazio, still holding his stiletto ready for use.

"No."

"I thought not," grinned Fazio, as he placed his stiletto in its sheath, but sternly watchful of Vittorio the while.

Mario had not taken part in this dispute, but Dick could see, by the look in his eyes, that he would have resented any attempt to make him the messenger.

"Knowing that Diamond Dick is all right, the plan is to blow up his shack and the dynamite cave together," went on Vittorio, as if nothing had happened to disturb the even flow of his ideas.

"If one goes, the other must," observed Fazio.

"They are so near together that one cannot escape if the other is destroyed," added Mario.

"What are they saying?" whispered Simon to Dick.

Mrs. Crutcher raised her hand as if she would knock her better half flat upon the ground.

"Hush!" replied Dick, in a low tone. "I will tell you later!"

Mrs. Crutcher shook her fist at Simon, who bowed his head meekly and kept quiet.

"Where are the others?" asked Vittorio of Mario.

"All up at the bridge, Vittorio," replied Mario. All, that is, except he who was killed at the station by that big engineer."

"Ah! We will avenge our brother before we leave Pocomo. At present, we must deal with Diamond Dick,"

declared the leader, with a smile of hate that was not pleasant to see.

Diamond Dick saw this smile, for the moonlight was shining full upon the face of Vittorio, and the young fellow determined that he must keep his eyes wide open if he meant to avoid the Black Hand leader's stiletto or the death by dynamite so obligingly planned for him.

"Let us go," added Vittorio, after a pause, during which he seemed to be thinking deeply.

The three men turned away from the railroad track, on the side opposite to the hiding-place of Dick and his two companions, and plunging into the small thicket of pines, emerged a minute later on the rocks that led up to the dynamite cave.

They were within five hundred yards of the shack from which Dick had escaped; and he was grateful to Fazio for refusing to go up there to see that the prisoner was still there.

"If Fazio had gone, we should have been obliged to get out of this in a hurry," whispered Dick.

"Why?" asked Mrs. Crutcher.

Dick remembered that neither Mrs. Crutcher nor her husband had been able to follow the Italian conversation of the desperadoes, and he told them briefly all that had been said.

"I wondered whut them thar spo'ts wuz drawin' knives an' shakin' fists at each other fer," remarked Simon.

"I knowed all ther time," snapped Mrs. Crutcher. "So would you, Simon, ef yer wuzn't so plumb eediotic."

"Whut air we goin' ter do now, Dick?" asked Simon, disregarding the scowls of Mrs. Crutcher, which he could dimly make out in the moonlight.

Dick did not reply immediately, for he was reconnoitering, paying particular attention to the railroad bridge, where Mario had stated the other Black Handers were assembled.

That they had not been near the bridge a short time before, when he moved the hand-car away, Dick was positive, but he considered it extremely likely that they had gone there since.

It would demand a great deal of caution on Dick's part to cross the railroad track without being seen by the men at the bridge, if they were still there, but he believed he could do it.

"Simon, can you crawl along quite flat?" he asked.

"Shore!"

"Come on, then?"

Dick threw himself down, and worked his way, snake-like, out of the bushes and over the open railroad track, taking advantage of the flickering shadows of the pine-trees, and never going outside the radius of their dark forms as thrown by the moonlight upon the track.

In a few moments Dick was standing behind a huge pine, looking across for Simon.

"Hyar I am, Dick," whispered Simon, who had fol-



lowed so close that he was at Dick's side, touching his elbow.

"Good, Simon!" smiled Dick. "You are as clever at that kind of work as an Apache.

"Whut about me?" demanded Mrs. Crutcher, who was standing on the other side of Dick.

"Good gracious! Did you come, too, Mrs. Crutcher?" he asked in unfeigned astonishment.

"Shore! Whut else wuz thar fer me ter do?"

"I did not care to ask a lady to crawl along in that way," explained Dick.

"Nat'rally, but I come all ther same. Drive ahead! You'll find Matilda Crutcher wi' yer ontill we git ter Billy Doo and the Sarpint, ef I hez ter go ther whole distance ther same way ez I jest crossed ther railroad."

Dick knew that Mrs. Crutcher was not given to idle boasting, and he doubted not that she would do exactly as she had said.

He did not argue with her, but turning sharply around, darted away toward the rocks leading to the dynamite cave.

He had gone half-way up the path, hidden at every step by the jutting crags and many trees, when he heard the voice of Handsome Harry, muffled by distance, and still more deadened by his being in the cave, shouting his name:

"Dick! Dick!"

It was with only the greatest difficulty that Diamond Dick restrained himself from replying at the top of his voice.

Instead of doing so, Dick took a chance by uttering the long coyote yell which was the understood signal among the pards at all times.

There was no response, and Dick wondered whether it was because his old pard was unable to give one, or through caution, it being obvious that if the Sarpint had replied with a similar coyote yell, any enemies who might be within hearing would understand at once that it was not a real coyote which had been heard in the first place.

"Handsome Harry is foxy," commented Mrs. Crutcher, who took the view that the Sarpint had kept quiet from motives of discretion.

Dick did not answer, but cautiously hiding himself as well as possible among the rocks, crawled forward until he was within sight of the cave in which the dynamite was stored, and where his pards were prisoners.

He saw six men, all masked, standing in front of the cave, while two others had crawled upon the roof.

Holding up his hand to keep Simon and Mrs. Crutcher back, Dick moved forward, still hiding himself from the men in front of the cave, until he was within twenty yards of them.

He saw that the men on the roof were doing something to the heavy logs that covered in the cave, while

the other six were standing ready, apparently, to prevent the escape of his two pards inside.

"I'll take chances with my gun," muttered Dick inaudibly, as he prepared to rush upon the six men in front of the cave.

He had taken one step, when a stiletto flashed before his eyes, and he had only just time to parry a murderous thrust with the barrel of his six-shooter.

Then, with all his might, he struck at a masked man who had attacked him with the knife, and brought him to the ground, with a powerful blow of his six-shooter.

The man rolled over without a word, and Dick wondered, in absent way, whether his blow had been fatal.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### PLOTTED BY DEMONS.

Diamond Dick did not waste time examining his fallen foe, but rushed forward toward the cave, determined to shoot down all who opposed him.

Simon and Mrs. Crutcher were close on his heels, and he heard their six-shooters click as they prepared them for action.

It looked as if there were about to be as lively a battle as that region ever had seen.

"Look hyar, Simon," whispered Mrs. Crutcher in the ear of her spouse.

"Waal, whut is it?" was his curt response.

"Jest this, Simon Crutcher," she replied sternly. "Don't yer go ter lettin' off thet thar gun o' your'n till I gi'es yer orders. Savvy?"

"Waal, but Matilda——"

"Never mind 'bout talkin', Simon," she interrupted. "Do ez I tell yer, or I'll shore mek yer hard ter find when I gits yer home."

"You're plumb hard on a gent," complained Simon.

"I knows my bizness, an' I shore knows you," she snapped. "Them thar ca'tridges in yer gun costs money, an' I don't aim ter 'low yer ter waste 'em none. Shet ep!"

Simon had not replied to this last remark of his wife, but she feared he might be going to speak, and was determined not to give him a chance.

To Dick's surprise, there was no one to be seen about the cave when he got there.

The two men had disappeared from the roof, and none of the six were to be found about the door.

"Harry!" cried Dick, in guarded tones, at the door.

"Hush! Don't shake ther door," was the response in the Sarpint's well-known tones.

"What do you mean?" demanded Dick, tugging at the door, and causing it to shiver slightly.

"Hully chee! Git away, Dick!" squeaked Billy Doo's voice.

Diamond Dick was mystified, but he stepped back from the door, looking suspiciously about him the while.



Could it be possible that the Italians had gone into the cave, and were compelling his pards, at the muzzle of the six-shooter, to order him back?

It certainly looked like it, considering that there had been eight of the Black Handers in the vicinity a few minutes before, although none were to be seen now.

"What do yer mek of it, Dick?" asked Simon, in a whisper.

"I don't know, Simon," replied Dick, and he spoke the exact truth when he said so.

"Dick!"

It was Handsome Harry, calling cautiously.

Dick leaped back to the door and eagerly responded: "What is it, Harry?"

"Billy an' me is locked in hyar."

"Then why do you tell me to go away?"

"Thar's dynamite in hyar. Ef yer shake ther place, it might mek thet pesky stuff break loose. Savvy!"

Dick smiled to himself at the Sarpint's apprehensions, but he replied seriously enough:

"I'll try to get the door open without shaking it, Harry. I have a key, and I'll soon let you out."

"T'anks," put in Billy. "Youse is hot stuff, Dick."

Diamond Dick took his bunch of keys from an inside pocket, and fitted one to the lock.

The key would not go into the keyhole, and in another instant Dick realized that the rascals had tampered with the lock so that his key would be useless.

The keyhole was nearly full of sand, small pieces of stone and other rubbish, all forced in so hard that it made a compact mass against which the key was powerless.

The door must be forced open, if it were to be opened at all, and the operation might result in shaking the place, producing so much concussion, that the dynamite stored within would be exploded.

In a few words Dick told the state of things to his two pards within, and then shook the door slightly in an endeavor to force it open.

"Great George Washington! Don' do thet, Dick!" pleaded Handsome Harry, in terrified accents.

"No! Cheese de jolts!" added Billy Doo.

"Git on ther roof," suggested Simon Crutcher.

"Who?" demanded his wife irritably.

"Waal, my dear, I ain't askin' you ter do it," explained Simon, apologetically. "I thought I mought go up thar mese'f."

"Yese, an' git them thar second-best pants you air wearin' all torn up by ther splinters. Simon Crutcher, you shore air more kinds of a durned fool than I ever expected ter meet in all my life," stormed Mrs. Crutcher, giving her husband a shove that sent him violently against the door of the dynamite cave.

"Hully Jerusalem! Wot's dat?" squeaked Billy Doo, within.

"It's this hyar stoopid Simon, Billy! He wants ter send us all ter ther other world afore our time," cried Mrs. Crutcher.

Diamond Dick had been carefully considering the situation for the few moments that were occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Crutcher in one of their domestic squabbles that were always on tap, no matter what the time or place.

There seemed to be only one feasible way of getting into the cave, and that was by the roof.

The Italians had all vanished, and were doubtless as far away as they could get by this time, expecting the dynamite to go off at any moment, for Dick doubted not that they were expecting the disturbance created within by Handsome Harry and Billy to jar down some of the dynamite, and blow up both the dynamite cave and the shack, not so very far away, although on a little lower level.

"Harry!" he whispered.

"Waal?"

"I'm going to climb on top of the cave."

"Waal, go ahead, Dick! But don't shake ther shack too much. It's shore a shivery sort o' structoore."

"All right!"

"Say, Dick!" put in Billy Doo.

"Well?"

"Ef dis shack goes up in der air, I'd like ter have it in de poipers dat I wuz risin' in de world when I died. I'd like ter have it said, ez well, dat I wuz tryin' ter find out whedder it is troo dat dey's allers room at de top."

"I'm afraid, Billy, there will be no one to see that all that is put in the papers if the dynamite lets go. We shall all go ballooning together," replied Dick, with a laugh. "Keep quiet, Billy! Here goes!"

Diamond Dick was as nimble as a cat, and it took him only a few seconds to hoist himself to the roof, notwithstanding that he was obliged to move carefully and more slowly than he would had there not been such a lot of dangerous material in the cave.

It was not quite clear to him why the Italians had come to the cave at all until he reached the roof. Then he understood.

His foot caught in a string, stretched tightly, a few inches above the logs, and it almost threw him down.

At the same moment there came a yell of mortal terror from Handsome Harry.

"What is the matter, Harry?"

"Don't move, Dick!" bellowed the Sarp.

"Dat's wot! Cut out de cakewalk, Dick!" added Billy Doo, whose accents indicated that he was as frightened as the Sarpint.

"Whut's ther trouble?" demanded Simon, his face suddenly appearing above the edge of the roof.



"Come down thar, you Simon!" piped Mrs. Crutcher, below.

Amid the confused noise of so many persons speaking at once, Dick did not at first realize what it all meant, but Handsome Harry shouted to him to listen.

"Go ahead, Harry!" responded Dick.

"Waal! When you stumbled over thet string jest now, you shook down a stick o' dynamite?"

"What?" shouted Dick. "Impossible!"

"Mebbe it wuz impossible, but it happened jest ther same," replied the Sarpint doggedly. "I accidentally caught it in my arms, or thar'd be nothin' left of us at this hyar moment, an' thet's whutever."

"De Sarp is givin' it ter youse straight, Dick," attested Billy Doo earnestly. "An' dey's more dynamite hangin' ter de roof out of our reach. I kin see it in de moonlight wot filters t'roo between de logs."

Diamond Dick knelt down upon the roof and examined the string in which he had caught his foot.

A short investigation convinced him that at least eight sticks of dynamite were hanging to strings between the logs, and that all the strings were attached to one principal one that lay along the roof from one end to the other, and was supported by nails at either end.

The dynamite was so fixed that a slight movement of the main string would shake down all or some of the sticks!

"Hyar's a long string hangin' f'um ther roof," announced Mrs. Crutcher, below. "Shall I pull it down ter see whut it is?"

"Don't touch it, for your life!" shrieked Diamond Dick frantically.

## CHAPTER IX.

### SAVED BY A FINGER-TIP.

It was a fiendish plot, conceived with horrible ingenuity, and it looked at first glance as if it must be successful.

Let Diamond Dick catch his foot in the main string, as he might have done easily before he saw what the Italians had done, and nothing could have prevented the destruction of the cave, as well as the shack where he had been confined, and where he probably would be now had he not found means of getting out.

He shuddered as he thought of what would certainly have happened had he not escaped from the shack.

Even now it was by no means sure that the dynamite sticks would not fall before he could get them all under control, for the strings were loose and the dynamite was held by only slight knots.

"Keep quite still, Simon," he directed, in a quiet tone.

"All right, Dick! So long ez my wife don't come up hyar pesterin' me, I kin do whut thar is ter do, wi'out mekin' no mistek, but ef she——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Dick impatiently. "But don't

worry about her just now. Help me to save all our lives."

"How?"

"There are nine strings hanging from this long string through the chinks in the roof. On each one of eight of the strings there is a stick of dynamite."

"Waal?" asked Simon coolly, not exactly comprehending what the situation was.

"If any of those sticks drop into the cave, there will be an explosion, and there are about fifty more sticks inside the cave, as well as these on the strings," explained Dick.

"Wow! Thar's goin' ter be a shake-up ef any o' them breaks loose," observed Simon, who was brave as a lion when away from Mrs. Crutcher, and who faced the awful peril pointed out by Diamond Dick without turning a hair.

"Begin at your end and pick them off one by one," directed Dick. "But mind you, do not shake that long string to which the smaller ones are tied. Do you understand?"

"Shore!"

"Then go ahead!"

Simon Crutcher reached through the chink for his first stick of dynamite and brought it up safely, while Dick did the same thing at the other end of the roof with his first stick.

The dynamite looked like sticks of brown sugar, and one could hardly imagine the frightful power hidden in the harmless-looking substance.

"That's two, all right," observed Dick.

"Shore! An' we'll git ther other six jest ez easy," declared Simon confidently.

"I hope so."

Number Two for each was brought up smoothly, and as the two new sticks were added to the first couple Diamond Dick began to think the task might be accomplished successfully, after all.

Handsome Harry and Billy Doo, below, were not talking, for they recognized the importance of their two comrades on the roof not being distracted by superfluous conversation.

Diamond Dick had brought up his third stick when he caught an exclamation of distress from Simon.

Without asking Simon what was the trouble, Dick glided over and lay down beside him, so that he could look through the chink at the stick of dynamite for which Simon was fishing.

He saw at a glance that Simon had the stick by the extreme end in his thumb and two fingers, and that he could not obtain a firm enough grasp to pull it up.

"This shore is a orkard fix, Dick," remarked Simon coolly. "I can't pull it up, and I dasn't let go. I wish you would reach down an' git hold o' ther pesky thing."

No one could have supposed, from the easy tone of



Simon Crutcher, that he was holding his own life, as well as that of his wife, and the three pards, by the tips of his fingers, and that the explosive was actually slipping away from him as he spoke.

But Dick knew it, and he acted like lightning.

It was well that Dick's movements were so swift, for it was only by a fraction of a second that he prevented the dynamite dropping with a crash to the rocky floor of the cave.

"That makes six we have," was all Dick said, as he saved the almost lost stick of dynamite, and placed it with the others. "There are only two more."

"You shore hev yer nerve wi' yer, Dick," was Simon's admiring remark, as he prepared to go after his last stick.

Simon brought up his last stick without difficulty, but Dick had a much harder task with his own, which refused to come up through the narrow space between the logs.

In all the other cases, there had been room for the hand to be thrust in, but now Dick had to pull up the string, with the possibility every moment of the dynamite stick slipping out of its loop and going down, to the destruction of them all.

For ten minutes at least Diamond Dick maneuvered with the string, every nerve on the strain, while Simon lay on his side, anxious to help, but powerless to do anything.

Mrs. Crutcher kept quiet, below, but she was watching keenly for the approach of any enemy, feeling that she was responsible for everything on the ground, now that Dick and her husband were busy on the roof.

She had caught enough of what Dick had said to realize that there was a delicate task on the hands of the two persons on the roof, and she did not venture to scold Simon at such a critical juncture.

"Look out, Dick! She's coming!" whispered Simon, at last, as he saw that the stick of explosive was almost within reach.

"I'll pick it out of the string when it comes within reach," announced Dick. "Don't you try to do it, or, between us, we are liable to drop it, after all, you know."

"Shore! I'll keep my hands off," answered Simon.

"By Jove! I have it!" cried Dick, as he got his hand firmly around the dynamite.

"By whom?" asked Simon.

"By me," laughed Dick. "With your help, of course. Now, I think we have spoiled the game of those Black Hand gentlemen. There are the eight sticks, and every string is empty. Help me pry off one of these logs. We'll get Billy and the Sarpint out by way of the roof, I guess."

Dick examined the strings minutely, to make sure that there were no other odd sticks of the explosives attached

to them, which might blow up the cave, notwithstanding all the labor of Dick and Simon Crutcher.

The logs were not very firmly secured, although a long railroad spike had been driven in here and there.

Some of the logs were not nailed at all, however, as Dick knew well, having superintended the building of the place some time before, and remembering accurately how it had been done.

Soon Simon and he had pried up two of the logs, but not side by side, so that there were two long openings, neither of them very wide, and neither offering an easy exit for a person as stoutly built as the Sarpint.

"How's we goin' ter git up dere?" asked Billy.

"I'll show you," replied Dick, as, with Simon's help, he let down one of the logs he had pried up, through the widest of the two openings.

As the log had come from the narrowest of the two, it is easy to understand that it went down easily, and could be placed by Billy and the Sarpint leaning against the wall, so as to form a rough ladder.

Billy went up first, at Dick's suggestion, so that he might give a hand to the Sarpint afterward.

It was an imposing task to hoist Handsome Harry through the opening, and he declared afterward that all the bark was taken off him, from the back of his neck to his boot-heels, but he got up somehow, and then, when he stood on the roof, free, he raised his voice for a howl which Dick stopped only just in time.

"Don't yell yet, Sarp! We are not out of this trouble yet, remember."

"I reckon not! But it feels so good to be in the open air ag'in, thet I c'u'd bust my b'iler wi' shoutin', an' by ther great horn spoon, I'm goin' down thar ter kiss Mrs. Crutcher!"

"Go ahead, Sarp!" laughed Simon. "You hev my permission."

"Hez he?" cried Mrs. Crutcher indignantly. "Waal, I shore admires ter hear thet thar. Who gi' you ther right ter say thet gents c'u'd come kissin' me, I should like ter know. Thar's a lickin' fer you, Simon Crutcher, an' you air goin' ter git it full an' plenty when I gits yer home."

Handsome Harry jumped to the ground, and contented himself with shaking Mrs. Crutcher's hand heartily, to which the good-natured landlady responded with a will.

Mrs. Crutcher liked Handsome Harry, and she was good-tempered to most people at all times, reserving her asperity generally for the unlucky Simon, who never ceased to wonder what had made him become the husband of the good lady who bore his name.

As the three pards, with Mr. and Mrs. Crutcher, stood together, getting their breath, Dick suddenly started and held up his finger for silence, as he listened intently.

"Do you hear that, Harry?" he asked anxiously.



"Shore!" replied Handsome Harry, after a moment of listening. "It's a train."

"Yes," cried Dick. "It is a train! It's the midnight train from Crocker, due just about this time, and those Black Handers are going to wreck her at the bridge!"

Without another word, Dick bounded down the rocky path, the others all following.

## CHAPTER X.

### WHAT DICK FOUND IN THE BRIDGE.

Dick's ears had told him the truth. It was the midnight train from the mountain town of Crocker, which ordinarily went over One Man River bridge at full speed.

Something told Dick that the mutineers, whose attempts to wreck the train by means of the hand-car had been discovered by him, would not let the train escape them if they could help it.

Vittorio was an implacable foe when he had made up his mind to injure any one, and Dick knew that among the orders received by the Black Hand group in Pocomo was one for the wrecking of this train.

There would be a twofold object in this.

One was for the sake of the loot that might be secured from the express car, and the other that the blowing up of the train would probably hide all traces of the murder of himself and his pards which had been so nearly accomplished.

The train was a long way off as Dick reached the bridge, cautiously stepping out from the shadow of the trees, and reconnoitering before going out upon the railroad track.

Nobody was to be seen, aside from their own party, but Dick doubted not that the Italians were lurking in the neighborhood, prepared to steal from the train under the pretence of rendering assistance.

He knew the character of the rascals gathered under Vittorio's leadership too well to credit them with scruples of any kind when there was crime to be committed.

"Don't go out too ventoorse," warned Handsome Harry, as Dick, after a long, steady survey of the track and bridge from the shelter of the trees, at last stepped into the open. "Thar's danger! Thet's whut!"

"Dat's wot!" echoed Billy. "Youse can't put too much faith in dem dagos. Dey's a rotten bunch. I shouldn't wonder ef dat wuz de reason dey left deir own country. Let yer Uncle Billy go foist. Ef dey wuz ter shoot, dey wouldn't have sech a big target ez ef youse or de Sarp wuz dere. De Sarp, in pertickler, is allers gittin' where he didn't ought ter be, an' he's purty certain ter git plugged."

"Shet ep!" growled the Sarpint.

"I'll go first," announced Dick, in the quiet tone that meant he intended to be obeyed.

Swiftly he glided along the railroad track toward the bridge, and soon stood at the end of it, examining care-

fully every timber, while at the same time looking out for possible enemies.

"De bridge is all sound, Dick, ain't it?" asked Billy Doo, as he walked upon it and looked over it knowingly.

"Yes. I do not see anything to indicate that it has been tampered with. I hope the track is clear beyond."

"I shore reckon it is," put in Handsome Harry. "I am thinkin' it might be a wise play fer me an' Billy ter go along an' see. Thet thar train is comin' a-whoopin'."

"It shore is," agreed Simon Crutcher. "I'll go back ther other way a little, an' mek shore thet thar hand-car hezn't been chucked upon the main line ag'in."

"Good idea!" agreed Dick.

"I'll go wi' yer, Simon Crutcher," proclaimed Mrs. Crutcher. "Thar's goin' ter be harm come ter them thar second-best pants o' your'n yet afore we git home, wi'out I go wi' yer ter keep yer in order."

Simon tightened his lips to prevent his saying anything rebellious to his better half, but it could be seen by Dick that he did not like his wife being with him quite so close all the time.

However, the Crutchers went down the line one way, while Billy Doo and the Sarpint walked swiftly away in the other, and Diamond Dick felt that he was doing all that was possible to save the train from the mysterious peril that he felt hung over it, and which was all the more to be dreaded because its nature was not clear.

"I should feel more satisfied if I knew the exact situation of Vittorio and his blackguards," muttered Dick, as he scrutinized the bridge a little more narrowly than before.

The train from Crocker came by a winding course around the mountain, so that it could be heard at intervals, even when a long way off, as it passed openings in the rocks or whirled across a bit of level, flat country.

Diamond Dick, as an experienced railroad man, could note the progress of the train by the sound, and he reckoned that in about ten minutes it would reach the bridge.

"I will remain here until it comes, and watch," he murmured. "I shall not feel safe until it has gone through. Then I can keep on the trail of the Black Handers until I bring them down. It is not to be supposed that they are going to get away from me after the outrages on the Sarpint and Billy, to say nothing of the theft of fifty thousand dollars and their attempt to blow me up with my pards."

Diamond Dick had said little about the robbery, because he was not inclined ever to discuss matters idly, but the matter had been in his mind ever since he had discovered the crime, although the peril to his own life, as well as that to his pards, had seemed to far outweigh in importance the loss of any amount of money.

Now that he felt he had got the better of the Italians so far as their greater rascality was concerned, he could



afford to give a little attention to the money, and he was curious to know how the thieves had contrived to get it out of sight so entirely, especially as it was entirely in gold.

Dick was a student of human nature, as well as a representative of the law, in his capacity of United States marshal, and he could not help being interested in the peculiar methods of the Black Hand, as displayed by Vittorio and his associates.

Billy Doo and Handsome Harry had already walked around a bend and were out of sight, while Simon and Mrs. Crutcher were lost in the deep shadows of rocks and trees in the other direction.

For the moment, Diamond Dick seemed to be alone.

He was brought to a realization that some one else was somewhere in the neighborhood by the sound of whispering voices.

Sheltered from observation to some extent by the rocks at either end of the bridge, as he had been, he was just about to walk back when the tones came to him, and he recognized them as Italian.

"Where are those fellows?" he muttered. "I suppose they have run away, expecting an explosion every moment. They are a considerable distance off, I am sure."

Dick knew the peculiarities of the wilds well enough to be aware that echo plays strange tricks, and he was not surprised that he could hear the Italians who were talking, notwithstanding that they were perhaps a quarter of a mile distant.

"I think they are coming nearer," he told himself. "They have figured that the explosion should have taken place before this, if it is to be done at all, and they are coming to investigate. Well, let them! We shall be prepared to give them a hot reception if they try any more nonsense."

Satisfied that the Italians could not see him, as he kept in the shadow, Dick resolved to make a more minute examination of the bridge before the arrival of the Crocker train.

"It is coming a-whooping, as the Sarpint says," muttered Dick, with a half-smile. "If it should strike the bridge when there is anything out of place, I never should forgive myself. Ah! What's that?"

It was the long wail of a coyote, from far up the track, and around the bend.

So familiar was Diamond Dick with every inflection of the signal used by his pards and himself, that he knew at once all was well when he heard the wail now.

He sent it back, with a rising and falling of sound that he knew would convey to the Sarpint and Billy Doo the importance of their being as vigilant as possible.

A short cry, ending in a yelp, was the answer, and it said "All right!" to Dick as plainly as if the words had been uttered.

Dick was looking down the steep embankment of

rock at the end of the bridge, below which the rough waters of One Man River were galloping and splashing along angrily.

Carefully he descended upon the rocks, holding on almost by the skin of his teeth, so slippery were they, until he stood on a slab, below the bridge, and so close to the edge of the water, that the spray swept over his feet from time to time.

He could see the network of timbers supporting the bridge, and was pleased to note how strongly it was built, for it had been erected under his own supervision, and he prided himself upon it, as has been intimated in a former chapter.

"It would take a great deal to beat this bridge down," he observed, aloud. "When we put it up, we did it for a long time of usefulness, and I am in hopes that it will warrant my expectation."

He stood there on the slab, looking at the timbers one by one, and admiring, with the eye of an architect and engineer, the neatness of the joints and the graceful sweep of the whole structure, when suddenly he drew himself together with a convulsive start, and then, seizing one of the slanting wooden beams near him, drew himself up into the orderly tangle of timbers with feverish haste.

"Dynamite!" he muttered hoarsely.. "The villains have planted dynamite in the bridge to wreck that train!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### IN THE THICK OF IT.

Diamond Dick worked himself from beam to beam, and from upright to cross-piece, with the agility of an athlete quite sure of himself, until he hung over the very center of the river.

The waters boiled below him, as if angry with him for attempting to deprive them of the prey that would be hurled to them when the bridge should destroy the train and kill all the human beings in it.

That the bridge would be blown up if the train came to it while the dynamite was where it was could not be doubted.

Dick had climbed straight to the place where he saw that a bundle of sticks of dynamite had been so artfully placed that they would be shaken by the wheels of the engine and the first car into a position where the following wheels would strike them.

"The fiends!" muttered Dick.

If the dynamite were to explode under the engine, it would necessarily blow it into the air, but might not cause the destruction of the entire train, even though the momentum would most likely cause all the cars to climb over each other and topple into the river.

This was not what the Black Handers desired, because in that event they might not be able to secure all the loot.

If, on the other hand, the cars were blown up, the



fragments would be scattered over the country at either end of the bridge, and the demolishing of the bridge itself would not mean the burying of everything in the waters of the river.

That was Diamond Dick's reading of the method followed by the Italians, and he found out afterward that he had been correct in his solution.

Dick could have climbed up the bank of slippery rock and run over the bridge to the spot where the dynamite had been placed, but that would have taken him longer than to reach it underneath.

The fact that the route he took was fraught with danger meant nothing to him, for it was ever his way to go straight to the point at which he aimed, regardless of personal peril.

Moreover, he was a practiced gymnast, and it was rather a pleasure to him than otherwise to lift himself from one beam to another by his hands, when the relaxing of his grip for an instant would mean a plunge to almost certain death.

He soon reached the spot, and then he saw that it would require great care to remove the dynamite without its going off in his very hands.

"I wish those two boys were here," he thought, referring to Handsome Harry and Billy Doo.

He might have given voice to the cry of the coyote, but to do that properly he must be in a position where he could control his voice, something that would be impossible as he hung to the beam.

Throwing one leg over a long timber, immediately below the ties that supported the rails, Dick's head and shoulders emerged through the skeleton floor of the bridge, and he began, slowly and carefully, to take the dynamite away.

It was as delicate an operation as had been that on the roof of the cave, where he had had the assistance of Simon Crutcher, and Dick appreciated this when one of the sticks nearly slipped out of his fingers.

He caught it, fortunately, and laid it on top of the bridge, by the side of three other sticks which he had removed previously.

"If that had gone down, I should have gone up," mused Dick, with grim humor. "It would have struck some of the cross-pieces below, and there would have been nothing left of the bridge, or me, either."

Dick had placed nine of the sticks upon the bridge, and saw that there was only one more, which he was about to dive for, when he stopped in sudden terror.

A locomotive whistle sounded—seemingly close by!

"The train is almost here!" he murmured. "And that last stick is harder to get at than any of the others."

He bent down, his head far below the level of the bridge floor, when he caught another whistle, farther away!

A gulp of relief from Dick, as he realized that he had

been deceived by the echoes again, and that, although the train might arrive in another two or three minutes, there was still time for the explosive to be got out of the way—if he were lucky.

How obstinate that last stick was!

It had been wedged tightly into an angle of the timbers, apparently as a foundation for the other stick, each of which had been placed with exactitude, so that it should do damage in the way that the rascals who put it there had designed.

Dick tugged at the stick as violently as he dared, for a false move would have meant destruction, as he well knew, and at last he was successful.

Out came the stick, and Dick drew himself out of the mass of timbers to the bridge proper, his bundle of dynamite lying on the floor by his side.

The locomotive shrieked again, and this time Diamond Dick knew it was not far away.

Slowly and daintily, he picked up the dynamite, until he had the ten sticks lying in the hollow of his left arm, carefully held in place with his right hand.

"I'll throw this wretched stuff into the water," he decided. "It is a shame to waste the railroad supplies in such a way, but it is better to lose a few sticks of dynamite than to send a whole train up into the air, with the loss of a lot of lives."

He was walking gingerly over the open timbers that formed the floor of the bridge, avoiding the rails and stepping from one spot to another as if he were treading on eggs, when a shout made him turn quickly and look up the track toward the bend where Handsome Harry and Billy Doo had disappeared some time before.

He had not heard from either of them since the coyote signal came to his ears telling him that all was well.

But the shout he heard now was of a different kind altogether, although he knew it to be in the tones of his old pard, Handsome Harry.

The shrieking of a locomotive was the explanation, and then Dick saw Handsome Harry and Billy Doo rushing toward him at top speed.

What did it all mean?

That there was something unusual Dick knew at once, for both the Sarpint and Billy Doo were waving their arms wildly toward the rocks on one side of the railroad.

Dick followed the direction of their signals, but at first could not make out anything, although he surmised that there was danger among the rocks and pines that bordered the track.

Standing in the middle of the bridge, with the dynamite in his arms, Dick waited for his pards to approach close enough to tell him what was in the wind.

Handsome Harry and Billy Doo were running at full speed toward him, when two Italians, without masks, but whom Dick did not recognize, emerged from the shelter



of the trees, and, stilettoes in their hands, plunged toward him, as if to interfere with his carrying away of the dynamite.

What their object could be in this Dick did not exactly comprehend, but he had the satisfaction of seeing that they were frustrated, for Handsome Harry and Billy Doo flew at them, and, before they could use their knives, had them in a good, honest American grip that rendered them powerless.

Handsome Harry, with his enormous strength, of course easily reduced one of the men to subjection, but Billy Doo was a decided surprise for the other, who had not expected to find so much well-trained muscle in a boy of Billy's rather small dimensions.

As the Sarpint and Billy came into collision with the two Italians, two others appeared, much nearer the bridge than their fellow-countrymen, and came surging toward Dick, threatening him with their stilettoes.

Dick saw that there was no time to be lost, if he meant to get rid of the ten sticks of dynamite, for the train was coming around the bend, and the time which must elapse before the locomotive reached the bridge could be measured only in seconds.

It was a desperate moment, but Dick felt himself equal to it, unless the enemy should execute a flank movement by bringing other Black Handers to the aid of the four already in evidence.

On came the two Italians, bent on snatching the dynamite away from Dick, as he thought, and still the train thundered down toward the bridge, as if eager for destruction.

Dick did not recognize the two Italians who had singled him out for attack, any more than he did the two others who were paying attention to the Sarpint and Billy Doo, and he could not help paying tribute to the cunning of Vittorio, who used strangers for the dirty work, keeping out of sight himself, so that he should not be identified in case of trouble over this night's work.

"The fools!" muttered Dick. "Don't they know that if they get this dynamite away from me, it will probably fall and blow us all out of existence? I don't understand them."

As it proved afterward, the Italians did not know Dick was handling the dynamite, and their only purpose was to capture him before he could signal the train, and perhaps, make them all prisoners.

Dick did not understand this at the time, however, and the action of the Italians looked very much like imbecility.

But there was no time for argument, and when he saw that Billy Doo and Handsome Harry had overcome their assailants, his only anxiety was to throw the ten sticks of dynamite into the water.

"Come over hyar, Dick!" bellowed Handsome Harry,

"an' bring them two ginneys wi' yer!" referring to the Italians who were almost upon his pard on the bridge.

"Dat's wot! Come on, Dick, an' he'p us enjoy dis picnic!" added Billy Doo cheerfully.

But Dick was busy at that particular moment.

"Hold those rascals till I get rid of this dynamite," he shouted. "Then I'll lend you both a hand!"

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE WRECK.

With a bound, Dick reached the side of the bridge, heaving the ten dynamite sticks far into the boiling stream.

He had chosen the down-stream side of the bridge, of course, so that the explosive should be washed swiftly away, and he was relieved that there was no blow-up when the dynamite struck the water.

Concussion will set off dynamite, no matter how the concussion is caused, and there have been recorded explosions resulting from the dangerous stuff being thrown from a height upon the surface of smooth water.

In this case luck stood by Dick, and he knew, as soon as the dynamite had been swallowed up by the torrent, that there was no fear of a report, followed by destruction, of which he had been in some little apprehension when he let the explosive leave his hand.

He had little time to reflect upon this, however, for the train was awfully close, and he made a dart for the other end of the bridge, the two Italians close behind him.

Dick had just time to hurl himself up the bank behind a tree, the two Italians, whose vengeful pursuit of him had changed to one of frantic eagerness to get out of the way of the train, when a thunderous roar, followed by a crash that seemed as if it were the smashing together of two mountains, told him that the catastrophe he had labored so desperately to prevent had taken place, after all.

Dick knew what it was before he tore down the rocky bank, hurling the two snarling Italians aside simultaneously with a sweep of his two hands.

The Black Handers, still grasping their stilettoes, flew into the thicket as they saw that the train had been wrecked, and Dick hastened toward the engine, which was lying across the track upon its side.

The train had been stopped by a charge of dynamite about a dozen yards from the other side of the bridge!

Handsome Harry and Billy Doo, still holding their captives, were lying in a heap by the side of the track, and two freight cars, immediately following the locomotive, were ripped open and their contents scattered about all over the railroad.

The express car, which followed the freight cars, was intact, and the one passenger-coach—a small one—was also uninjured.



Dick's first care was to look at the engineer and firemen, both of whom, when they had set the brakes, in obedience to the warning shouts of Handsome Harry and Billy Doo, had jumped before the explosion.

They were unhurt, save for some bruises received from flying debris, while the conductor and brakeman, both of whom had chanced to be in the caboose, which was the last car on the train, were of course all right.

Dick's practiced eye told him that the charge of dynamite had been a small one, for, had it been otherwise, it must have destroyed the whole train in a flash.

The conductor and brakeman came running toward Handsome Harry and Billy Doo, and, at Dick's order, took charge of the two lowering ruffians who had been overcome and disarmed by the two pard.

There were handcuffs in the caboose, articles which are likely to be needed at any time in a country abounding with train-robbers and "bad men" generally, and the two Black Handers were soon secured to an iron hand-rail in the baggage compartment of the caboose by their wrists, where they were left to swear in Italian to their heart's content.

There were four cowboys passengers in the coach, and they immediately volunteered to ride into Pocomo for help if anyone could give them something to ride.

"Wot's de matter wit' dat hand-car?" suggested Billy Doo.

"Come off!" exclaimed one of the cattlemen. "Whar's a ho'se? I dunno nothin' 'bout no hand-car."

"It beats a ho'se ev'ry time," insisted Billy Doo grinning. "Look dere!"

Simon and Mrs. Crutcher were both pumping their way along on the hand-car which Dick had run upon the siding some time before, and the machine was coming at a noble pace.

"Ain't dat a picter?" squeaked Billy Doo.

"It shore is a captivat' tabloo," declared Handsome Harry. "But thar's a doubt in my mind whether Simon is doin' his full share o' ther labor. I'm willin' ter bet a stack o' blues thet Mrs. Crutcher is puttin' on forty pounds o' steam ter his one!"

The four strange cattlemen went down the track to meet the hand-car, walking rather gingerly over the bridge, notwithstanding that it was as sound as the rocks themselves, and Diamond Dick conferred with his two pards and the conductor of the train as to the next move.

"You know, Rogers, there are a lot of these disaffected Italians in the rocks close by, and it is they who tried to wreck your whole train," said Dick, addressing the conductor.

"I reckon they have wrecked it pretty badly, as it is, so that if they tried to do it, they may congratulate themselves on their work," grumbled Rogers, as he gazed at the smashed freight cars and overturned engine.

"Yes. But that is not the worst of it," remarked Dick.

"Well, perhaps not, but I don't see how it could be much worse," grumbled Rogers.

The conductor was responsible for his train, and even though Diamond Dick was president of the road, and therefore the person to whom he must answer, Rogers felt it his privilege to growl and refuse to be comforted even to a partial degree.

"It might have been worse if the passenger coach had been wrecked and you had lost your passengers," rejoined Dick severely. "Don't you see that yourself?"

"Oh, I suppose so," conceded Rogers grudgingly.

"Brace up, Rog, old turkey!" put in Billy, in his off-hand way. "Youse ain't de on'y gobbler on de plantation."

The conductor was indignant at being addressed in this familiar way by Billy, and he muttered something to the effect that his name was not "Rog," and that he was not a "gobbler," either.

He might as well have spared himself the trouble of making these observations, for Billy Doo was not listening to him, having been attracted by a suspicious movement among the rocks and trees at the side of the railroad.

"Dick!" he whispered in his pard's ear.

"What is it, Billy?"

Rogers was sauntering over to the prostrate locomotive, where the engineer and firemen were pottering about with lanterns and an oil-can, though what their purpose was with the latter article was their own secret.

Dick had just turned away from the train, now that he saw there was no immediate danger of any one being hurt, and that the express car was still intact, and he walked toward the side of the track with the lad willingly.

"Dey's some one hiding behind dem rocks, an' it's a cinch dat youse c'u'd find a Black Hand member ef youse wuz ter dig fur enough," went on Billy.

"Are you sure, Billy?"

"Cross me heart!"

"That's enough. Don't look in that direction. We must surprise them. I do not know how many there are, but I think there must be more than a dozen, even though we can account for two that have fallen out—the man shot in the railroad yard, and the other, whom I laid out with the barrel of my revolver," whispered Dick.

"How air we goin' ter git dem, Dick?" asked Billy Doo, looking the other way, in obedience to Dick's hint.

"By strategy. That is the only way," replied Diamond Dick.

"Wow! Look at thet thar!" bellowed Handsome Harry laughing, as he pointed to a general mix-up on the hand-car, which had been run up the track and upon the bridge.

Mrs. Crutcher had pushed Simon away from one handle of the hand-car, and the four cattlemen had displaced her from the other, which they were pumping with all their might.



They were not moving it very fast, in spite of their labors, for Simon, determined to get possession of the loose handle, had contrived to fall across it, and was lifted into the air each time it went up to its extreme height.

This performance was accompanied by roars of laughter from the cowboys, who, with the recklessness of men living their free life, had forgotten all about their narrow escape from a horrible death on the dynamited train, and were getting all the fun they could out of Simon.

The fun did not last long, however.

Simon was a well-built fellow, and, as has been mentioned already, did not fear anything on earth except his wife.

So, when he had been thrown up with a jerk three or four times, he managed to get away from the iron handle, and fell upon his four tormentors like a Trojan.

"Wow! That's right, Simon!" roared Handsome Harry delighted. "Pile inter 'em! Gi' each one his share! Never overlook a bet! Hoofs an' teeth! Go ahead! Wough-h-h-h!"

Billy Doo was screaming with laughter, while Mrs. Crutcher was shrieking with rage at the spectacle of Simon being four against one, and Dick looked on with a smile.

Then, as Dick turned away to hide his amusement from Mrs. Crutcher, who might have been hurt by it, he saw four men, masked, rushing up the rocky path toward the dynamite cave, each carrying two bags that he knew contained the money stolen from his rolltop desk in Pocomo!

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE STRANGE BOAT.

Diamond Dick was prompt when occasion called for the display of that sort of quality, and he took a hand in the scrap at the hand-car without hesitation or a word of explanation.

Hurling the cowboys in different directions, he caught Simon by the scruff of the neck and shook him.

"Whut's ther matter, Dick?" demanded Simon breathlessly, startled by Dick's energetic action.

"Come with me! I want you, Simon!"

Something in Dick's tone told Simon that there was work to be done, and that Dick depended on him to help, and it flattered his vanity to the extent of making him forget everything else for the time being.

As Dick moved away with Simon, Handsome Harry and Billy Doo, Mrs. Crutcher followed, as soon as she could get past the laughing cowboys, who playfully obstructed her passage.

The cattlemen ran the hand-car up to the front of the overturned engine, and were soon absorbed in conversation with the conductor, who was giving them directions about bringing help from Pocomo.

"Wot's dis, Dick?" asked Billy Doo, as he and Dick went a little ahead of the others.

"I think we are going to get back our money, Billy."

"Dat's wot! Dey shouldn't be no mistake about dat," nodded Billy Doo resolutely.

"Is your gun all right?" asked Dick.

"Sure! Yer Uncle Billy don't go ter do no stunts like dis wit'out bein' fixed wit' his tools."

He took out his six-shooter and examined it carefully,

his example being followed by Handsome Harry and Simon Crutcher.

"Whut air yer doin' wi' yer gun, Simon?" demanded Mrs. Crutcher, as she caught up to her husband.

"On'y looking at it, Matilda."

"On'y lookin' at it," repeated Mrs. Crutcher, with a scornful ring in her tones. "I s'pose you air goin' ter shoot somethin' wi' it arter a while, an' most likely it will be yerse'f."

"I reckon I kin use a gun," returned Simon sullenly.

"Shet ep!" whispered Handsome Harry. "Simon, quit pesterin' Mrs. Crutcher, will yer?"

"Don't yer hear whut ther Sarpint says ter yer, Simon?" added Mrs. Crutcher, turning up her eyes resignedly. "Yer don't know how ter treat a wife, it seems ter me. I—Ow! Ow! Help!"

The last three exclamations were uttered in a series of shrieks, as Mrs. Crutcher disappeared over the edge of the bluff from the path they were pursuing with a scuffling sound, as if she were trying to maintain her footing in difficult circumstances.

"This way!" shouted Dick, as he went over the precipice after Mrs. Crutcher, while Simon, anxious for the safety of his wife, came to the edge and dived head first.

"Hully chee!" exclaimed Billy, as he and Handsome Harry followed, but feet first.

The way led down a steep path which sloped away from the railroad to a stream which emptied into One Man River some distance away.

It was one of those strange trails, leading in unexpected directions, which are common among the mountains of the Southwest, and even Dick did not know where he was, in the darkness.

The moon was high in the heavens, but there was a thick growth of pines and dwarf oaks over the gorge into which the party had all so suddenly plunged, and Dick was bewildered, as he followed Mrs. Crutcher into the unknown with a determination characteristic of him.

For a few moments all the party except Mrs. Crutcher paused on the narrow path, to regain their breath.

Simon had tumbled and rolled over the rough rocks and sand, and was in a rather disgruntled state, especially with regard to those famous "second-best pants," which caused his wife so much solicitude.

She, good lady, had gone ahead, and nothing had been seen or heard of her since she uttered her cries of dismay and vanished over the edge of the rocks into the gorge.

Dick had caught sight of an evil face, with dark eyes and black mustache, by the side of Mrs. Crutcher, for an instant, just before she disappeared, and he knew it was that of Vittorio, even in that brief glimpse and in the semi-darkness.

The leader of the Black Hand had a face that was not easily forgotten when once seen, and Dick knew it so well that he could not be mistaken, in spite of the brevity of the view he had had.

"Whut do yer think of it, Dick?" asked Simon anxiously, as he stepped in front of Billy Doo to get nearer to Diamond Dick.

"It is plain enough to me, Simon," returned Dick sympathetically. "Mrs. Crutcher happened to stumble over him when he was hiding, and he dragged her away."

"Dat's it," nodded Billy Doo.

"Thet wuz when she squealed, I reckoned," opined Handsome Harry.



"Yes. She wuz plumb skeered, too. I c'u'd tell thet by ther noise she made," put in Simon sorrowfully. "Waal, when I gits my hands on ther dago ez done it, I'm goin' ter double him up wi' my gun an' then cut him loose wi' my knife."

Simon uttered these bloodthirsty sentiments in a calm tone, which suggested that he meant exactly what he said, the truth being that he regarded his wife with the greatest respect, and was always ready to fight for her, in spite of the fact that she most certainly henpecked him whenever there was the slightest excuse for that operation.

"I don't suppose she is hurt," suggested Dick.

"No, I don't think she is, nuther," agreed Simon, in a tone of relief to find that Dick held the same opinion. "Thar wouldn't be no motive fer them dagos ter do thet. She allers gits along wi' 'em, too, an' even Salvadore hez a good word fer her."

"Wot's all dis chin about?" broke in Billy Doo impatiently. "Dey've took her away 'cause she wuz on ter deir coives, an' dey wuz afeard she'd give de snap away."

"How?" demanded Handsome Harry.

"Aw, Sarp! Youse is sech a sloppy ol' mark, dat youse will all run away ef yer don't watch out," returned Billy scornfully. "Dey won't be nuttin' left o' youse but dem red whiskers, an' dey'll look like a pile o' rusty iron shavings wot's fell into a plate o' tomater soup! Back up, an' try ter be a United States citizen!"

As Billy Doo gave utterance to this long tirade, Handsome Harry tried to make out in the semi-darkness the expression of Billy's face, for it was almost incredible to the big plainsman that his young pard would have the presumption to give him such a dressing down when the two were necessarily close together.

But Billy was imperturbable. He knew that Dick stood between him and the Sarpint, and that it would be impossible for the plainsman to get at him in that narrow space.

"Back up, Sarp! Dat's wot I say," added Billy, as Dick moved down the path, and the whole party followed.

Handsome Harry never has got over that particular piece of impudence on the part of Billy Doo, and they occasionally have arguments over it to this very day.

All this had occupied only a minute or so, although it has taken some time to tell, and as soon as the party had got their breath and looked to the six-shooters in their belts, they went down the tortuous, narrow path in a hurry.

The water roared along, for the bed of the stream was not very wide, and the recent rains had sent the many rivulets from the mountains tearing down wildly.

"This way!" shouted Dick, as he reached a place where a broad, flat slab of rock overhung the rushing torrent.

"Wot is it?" asked Billy Doo.

"Git on an' don't ask questions," bawled Simon.

"Thet's whutever," added Handsome Harry.

"Come on, quick!" commanded Dick sharply.

As he spoke, he poised himself for an instant on the edge of the slab, and then jumped!

"Hully chee! Is dis a case o' swimmin'?" squeaked Billy.

Before Billy could answer his own question, there was a deafening report, and splinters of rock flew in all directions, as the slab to which Billy had leaped flew into a thousand pieces.

"Dynamite ag'in, by hinks!" roared Handsome Harry, as he and Simon clung to a narrow ledge some distance above the place where the slab had been a moment before.

It was dynamite, and it was a mercy it did not bring the career of Billy Doo to a sudden close.

But Billy was not so easily killed, and, although the explosion had blown the slab to fragments, the lad was swimming as well as he could in the turbulent waters, trying to catch a large, flat-bottomed boat which was tearing down the gorge, and in which Diamond Dick was in conflict with two of the Italians who had sworn to kill him in the name of the dread Black Hand Society!

## CHAPTER XIV.

### GEE!

Diamond Dick was in a tight place, indeed.

He had perceived the boat carefully navigating down the stream, with Mrs. Crutcher sitting in the stern, a prisoner, and three men managing the boat and keeping guard over her at one and the same time.

His jump from the slab of rock had been a venture-some one.

Not only was there the danger that he would miss the boat altogether and smash himself against the jagged rocks that abounded among the fierce waters hurly-burly down the gorge, but he might have gone through the bottom of the boat and swamped her.

All these chances Dick was willing to take, however, for he had seen in the bottom of the boat the four bags containing the money stolen from his private office at the station of the Pocomo Railroad.

He knew that the boat could go down this narrow stream until it reached One Man Gorge River, and thence could travel through the wilds to a place where the rascals might get horses and depart for parts unknown.

The fact that their scheme to kill him and his pards had failed, and that nothing profitable had come from the wrecking of the train at the bridge, had obviously determined Vittorio and his two principal assistants, Fazio and Mario, to escape with what booty they could.

Fifty thousand dollars would make them all rich, especially if they could contrive to get away to Italy with it, taking up their abode in some small village, where fifty thousand dollars would be untold wealth.

Diamond Dick had recognized these three Black Handers as rascals who belong to that portion of the community which by villainous practices bring disgrace on their whole nationality.

For Italians in general Dick had the highest respect, but when he met scoundrels like these members of the Black Hand, who were anarchists as well, he felt that they should be crushed out of existence, just as he would put his foot upon a poisonous snake.

So Dick wasted no time in explaining his sentiments as he dropped into the boat among the startled villains.

"Hello, Di'mon' Dick!" cried Mrs. Crutcher, in shrill anger. "Jest git this hyar rope off'n me, an' then see whut a house-cleanin' I'll mek o' these hyar spiders. I on'y want one minute by ther watch, Dick! Jest one minute, an' not a tick more!"

Dick would have liked to give the poor lady her will, for she was most certainly in earnest, but circumstances prevented it just then.



The three Black Handers fell upon him together, stilet-toes raised on high.

Dick did not mean to be riddled with these slim knives just now, so he promptly knocked Vittorio's into the water with his six-shooter, and made Fazio drop his overboard by the simple method of giving him while he counted three to get rid of the stiletto or be shot through the head.

Fazio could see Dick's face in the moonlight, and came to the conclusion that the threat would be carried out unless the knife disappeared.

It seemed to hurt Fazio to part with his knife, but there was no alternative, and over it went.

Mario had been standing partly behind Dick, holding him with his left hand by the arm, and seeming to be hesitating whether he should drive the stiletto between Dick's shoulders or not.

As Fazio parted with his knife, Mario screwed up his courage to the place where he thought he could venture to sink his dagger in Dick's back.

Mrs. Crutcher screamed:

"Look out, Dick!"

But her warning was unnecessary, for Dick had been watching Mario from the beginning, without letting that individual see it, and now turned on him with a suddenness that almost caused him to drop the knife.

But Mario recovered himself quickly, and, as Dick had not been able to grasp the wrist of his knife-hand, he let drive with all his force, and sent the keen blade through Dick's shirt-sleeve, just below the shoulder.

Dick felt something that seemed to be a red-hot wire running along his flesh, and he knew that the keen edge of the stiletto had cut into his arm, but not deeply.

It was an unwise thing for Mario to do, because it made Diamond Dick very angry.

"You contemptible scoundrel!" shouted Dick, in an uncontrollable rage, as he snatched the stiletto from Mario's grasp.

It was only for a moment that Dick was in the ascendant.

The boat, left without guidance, was wobbling from side to side, and occasionally struck a sharp rock projecting into the stream, with such force as to threaten the smashing of the craft.

Vittorio, who was in command, had seen this, and recognized the importance of overcoming Dick, so that attention could be bestowed properly on the management of the boat.

He adopted a ruse.

Picking up a small piece of dynamite which lay in a box at his feet, he hurled it with all his force at the rocks below the slab to which Billy Doo had just descended.

The thunderous roar, as the slab split into atoms, sending Billy Doo into the water, startled everybody in the boat, and Dick involuntarily turned in the endeavor to see whether any of his friends on shore were hurt.

The boat was too far away from the slab, and the darkness was too heavy, for him to make out Billy's figure.

Neither Dick nor any of the other persons in the boat had seen Billy, the dynamite having been thrown by Vittorio merely to cause a diversion in the midst of which Dick could be overpowered.

The trick answered well, for the echoes had not ceased reverberating among the rocks of the mountain and

gorge, when Dick found himself lying helpless in the bottom of the boat, held down by the box from which Vittorio had taken the bit of dynamite upon his knees, while a seat ordinarily used by a rower was removed from its socket on either side, and then wedged into place over Dick's chest.

In that position Diamond Dick was powerless to move his arms and body, while, as to his knees, he was warned that any undue agitation would result in blowing everybody in the boat to perdition.

Diamond Dick would not have cared particularly what became of Vittorio, Fazio and Mario, but he had a decent respect for the lives of Mrs. Crutcher and himself.

Besides, he did not want the Pocomo and Skiplap Railroad to lose the fifty thousand dollars stolen from his office.

Vittorio seemed to know what was passing in Dick's mind, for, as Fazio and Mario, each with an oar, kept the boat off from the rocks as the boat swept down the stream, Vittorio bent over Dick, and snarled, triumphantly, speaking in Italian:

"There is a box with half a hunderweight of dynamite resting on your legs. If you raise your knees the box will tip over and the dynamite will go off. Take my advice and keep quiet."

"Why should I?" answered Dick. "If the dynamite is upset it will kill you as well as me."

"Yes, but I am not so stupid as to let the box remain so that you can kick it off until the proper time comes. You could not throw the box off now if you tried. I will arrange it when I am ready. I am only warning you what will happen if you do not behave yourself after we have left the boat."

"You are going to leave the boat, then?"

"Yes."

"Then you will be caught and put in jail in Pocomo," answered Dick calmly.

The quiet assurance with which Dick said this had its effect upon the desperado, and he tried to peer into the darkness around him, as if he feared there were enemies on the rocks that bordered both sides of the torrent down which the boat was rushing with awful rapidity.

He recovered from his apprehensions in a few moments, and stepping over to Dick, raised his hand as if he would strike his helpless prisoner in the face.

Perhaps he would have done it but for Mrs. Crutcher, who, seeing his purpose, thrust out one of her feet, nearly throwing him down, and into the water.

With an oath, Vittorio got to his feet and would have stabbed to the heart the indignant Mrs. Crutcher, as she has always believed, had not the boat suddenly become caught in an eddy among a mass of rocks partly covered by the water, so that it required the efforts of all three of the Italians to prevent its being capsized.

Diamond Dick determined that if the boat did go over, he would kick the dynamite box away somehow, if it could be done, knowing that it would be comparatively harmless under water.

Then he would wrench the seat away from his chest and release Mrs. Crutcher.

But it happened that he had no occasion to exert himself in this way, for, as the boat swung out of the eddy, it darted across the stream, which was wide at this point, and ran its nose into a soft mass of earth and sand, where it stuck fast.

"Get out of that!" commanded Vittorio, as he pulled



from under Dick's head the bags of stolen money which had been his pillow without his recognizing them.

While Diamond Dick was admiring the insolence of the rascals in actually making him rest upon his own money, and afterward snatching it away, the three Italians, carrying the bags of gold, leaped out of the boat and disappeared in the darkness.

Just then, a small, compact figure, bobbing about in the water, lifted itself out by the edge of the boat, and tumbling in all of a heap, the water pouring from it, exclaimed, in a tone of the deepest disgust:

"Gee!"

It was Billy Doo!

## CHAPTER XV.

### AT THE STILETTO POINT.

"Look out, Billy!" cried Dick, as his young pard seized the box of dynamite rather roughly.

"Wot's de matter, Dick?" demanded Billy.

"Nothing, except that there is half a hundredweight of dynamite in that box, and if you jar it, there will be a worse smash-up than happened to the train to-night," replied Dick.

Billy Doo stooped over the box, and the moonlight enabled him to see its contents, which he inspected for several seconds.

Then he lifted the box, with some difficulty, and slammed it down upon the bottom of the boat as hard as he could, in spite of Diamond Dick's shout of horror.

But there was no explosion.

"How is that, Billy?" asked Dick. "Is the dynamite spoiled?"

"Dey's nuttin' in de box but rocks. Dat's all, Dick. Dem dagos wuz handin' you a frozen bluff."

Diamond Dick muttered something between his teeth, and then, pushing the seat away that was holding him down, slashed away the ropes from Mrs. Crutcher with his bowie-knife.

"Thet's very kind o' yer, Dick," remarked Mrs. Crutcher composedly. "I wuz gittin' some stiff wi' bein' tied up like thet thar. But I reckoned I'd git out sooner or later, an' it wuzn't disturbin' me none."

Dick could not help admiring this matter-of-fact woman, who had been a prisoner in the hands of men so unscrupulous as these Black Handers, and yet had never uttered a word to show that she was afraid.

Dick did not stop to talk to any one in the boat, however, for he was set on getting back the stolen money at all hazards.

He saw that the three scoundrels had gone up a steep rock, and he knew that on the other side there was a rough road leading to Pocomo.

It was reasonable to suppose that the three Italians would hustle along this road to get to some of their hiding-places in the town, and seek an opportunity afterward to get away when no one was thinking about them.

"If you are inclined to walk fast, Billy, we can get to town as soon as Vittorio and his gang, and perhaps nail them before they have time to hunt their holes," suggested Dick.

"Sure! Dey don't know dat I wuz right dere, hanging on ter de boat part o' de time, and swimmin' away when dey got through peekin' over. When dey blew dat rock ter bits, it dumped me inter de water, but dey didn't know it," explained Billy.

"Thet's whutever," remarked Mrs. Crutcher quietly. "But what I wants ter know is, whar's Simon Crutcher?"

"He's all right," asserted Billy, in a careless tone.

"Yes, I know he's all right, so fur ez his own carcass is concerned," replied Mrs. Crutcher. "But I want yer ter onderstand thet he hez on his second-best pants, an' he's goin' ter git 'em all creased, an' p'raps torn. It's easy enough ter press 'em, but who's goin' ter mend 'em, eh?"

"Aw, fix 'em wit' glue," suggested Billy indifferently.

Mrs. Crutcher took no notice of this cruel advice, but, striding forth over the rock, struck the road Dick had described, and set out bravely for Pocomo, with Dick by her side.

The moon had gone down by the time they reached Pocomo, three-quarters of an hour later, and Dick, requesting Mrs. Crutcher to take Billy into her boarding-house, where he could have an opportunity of changing his wet clothing for dry garments, told her he would look about a little, in the hope of getting upon the trail of Vittorio and his two rascally companions.

Diamond Dick did not forget that the Black Hand had pronounced sentence of death upon him and his two pards, but he judged, rightly, that the prospect of looting the train that the band had wrecked, as well as the obtaining of fifty thousand dollars by the simple process of breaking open a roll-top desk, had caused Vittorio, Fazio and Mario to lose sight of the original order of the Black Hand.

He did not think there would be any attempt to murder him and his two pards if the gang could get away safely with their swag.

Had they wanted to kill Dick and the others, there were plenty of opportunities after the failure of the schemes to blow them up in the dynamite cave and the watchman's house.

But that would have entailed murder of a bare-faced kind, and the rascals were well aware that the whole of New Mexico would have been on their trail if they had ventured on such a crime.

Dick made his way carefully to Salvadore's boarding-house, and finding the back door unfastened—a bit of carelessness on the part of some of the inmates which never has been explained—he slipped in and crept up the rough, uncarpeted stairs to the landing above.

The large room in which had been held the meeting of the Black Hand was innocent enough now, from all that could be made out in the semi-darkness.

One bad-smelling coal-oil lamp, turned very low, glimmered at the other end of the large room, and Dick could make out the mattresses spread upon the floor, around the walls, as if the place never had been anything more sinister than a dormitory.

He thought the mattresses all looked too flat to be occupied, and as he edged his way into the room, on his hands and knees, he began to fear Vittorio and his two fellow rascals had escaped him, after all.

That the members of the Black Hand, who ordinarily slept in this room, as well as some others of the Italian laborers, had been up in the mountains, more or less concerned in the nefarious proceedings instigated by Vittorio, Dick was well assured.

What was not clear to him was what had become of all the others while Vittorio, Fazio and Mario were running away, helter-skelter, on land and water, with the stolen fifty thousand dollars.

Dick hoped he was near a solution of the puzzle, and



it was because he had allowed himself to become so deeply interested as not to think of anything else, that he was here, in this nest of anarchism and secret crime, in the early hours of the morning, with no means of protecting himself except the six-shooter and bowie-knife he wore at his belt.

Hush!

Dick lay perfectly motionless behind one of the mattresses, for some one had entered the room, carrying something heavy.

The newcomer threw the heavy object to the floor, and there was the clink of metal.

"The money from the desk!" thought Dick.

The man who had thrown the bag to the floor was standing perfectly still, waiting!

Another man came in, also with a bag, which he deposited by the side of that already on the floor, and stood, perfectly quiet, waiting!

A third man, with a bag, and then all three men, with the bags of coin at their feet, indulged in a low chuckle, but broken by their panting, for all seemed breathless, as if they had come a long distance hurriedly.

Dick knew at once who they were, and he felt his revolver in its holster, and then allowed his hand to stray to the handle of his bowie-knife.

He might have to use his weapons before he was two minutes older.

"Door, Mario," whispered the man who had entered last, and whom Dick knew, by his voice, to be Vittorio.

Mario closed and bolted the door, and then Vittorio gave another order, this time to Fazio:

"Lights, Fazio!"

Up went three lamps on the walls, with powerful reflectors behind them, one by one.

As the last one cast his glow straight at Diamond Dick, three six-shooters were leveled at his head, and the command, in English, was given by Vittorio, in a stern tone:

"Hands up!"

Diamond Dick did not like to obey such an order, but there was no choice, and, as he arose to his knees, he put up his hands on either side of his head, with as much grace as he could.

"Now, look here, Diamond Dick," began Vittorio slowly, in Italian. "We have tried to spare you, because we believed it would be dangerous to obey the orders of the Black Hand so far as you are concerned."

Dick was still upon his knees, and the three ruffians surrounded him, their pistols pointed straight at his head.

The light from one of the lamps shone full upon him, but none of the men watching him could say truthfully that he betrayed any fear.

The principal expressions to be discerned among those flitting across his handsome features was that of curiosity, mingled with amusement and some little resentment.

"There is one question I should like to ask," observed Dick in Italian, after a pause, following the speech of Vittorio.

"What is it?" growled the Black Hand leader.

"Have you any objection to my standing up?"

Vittorio looked sharply at Dick, as if to assure himself that there was no intention on the part of the prisoner to make an attempt at escape, and then replied gruffly:

"Stand up, if you like."

"Thanks," said Dick cheerfully, as he got to his feet in one lithe movement.

"Now, Fazio and Mario, put away your guns and get out your knives. You know your duty," grunted Vittorio.

In a twinkling a handkerchief was bound over the eyes of Diamond Dick, and his hands tied behind him with another of silk, as Vittorio snatched the revolver from his belt; and then Dick heard the one word, in Italian:

"One!"

He knew that at the word "Three!" three stilettoes would be buried simultaneously in his heart!

"Two!"

Could anything save him?

## CHAPTER XVI.

### VENGEANCE.

Diamond Dick was not without curiosity as to his fate, but the feeling had not degenerated into terror.

The only thing to which he had made up his mind was that he would not wait for the fatal "Three!"

Notwithstanding that the handkerchief over Dick's eyes rendered him totally blind, he could tell by the sense of hearing that Vittorio was near, with a revolver in his hand, for he could detect the nervous rubbing of the ruffian's thumb upon the upper surface of the hammer, as his forefinger rested against the trigger.

Only one familiar with the use of a pistol, and also blessed with keen hearing, could have told the attitude of the leader of the Black Hand.

There was an impressive pause, as Dick had expected, after "Two!" but he did not wait to see how long it would be before the word "Three!" accompanied by the stilettoes, rang through the room.

Judging his distance as well as he could, blindfolded, Dick suddenly darted forward in a stooping posture, intending to floor Vittorio with a blow of his head.

He had been tugging at the handkerchief holding his hands behind him.

Then there was the roar of a revolver, so close to his ear that it almost deafened him, and he found himself on the floor, with a man squirming about on top of him.

How hard Dick tried to get that handkerchief off his wrists!

It was a silk one, and silk clings with much greater tenacity than cotton. In fact, so well is this fact known, that cowboys often use silk handkerchiefs to tie the feet of the cattle they have roped, finding it much better than the ordinary tie-ropes.

Every moment Dick expected to feel a knife tearing its way to his vitals.

If he could only see, and get his hands loose, there might be a chance for him yet.

Otherwise, he was fighting against fearful odds, and he saw no probability of escape in the end.

At last, a hand tightened on his throat, as Vittorio's voice hissed fiercely:

"You can make up your mind that this is your last moment. We have the money, and we have you. Now! Take this!"

As Dick nerved himself to receive the blow with the stiletto, there was a tremendous crash, as the door burst



open, accompanied by a pistol shot, and Dick felt the cruel hand at his throat relax.

Then, with a mighty effort, he tore his wrists away from the handkerchief and pulled the other one from his eyes.

He saw that the room was full of laborers, most of whom he recognized as having been at work on the railroad, although he did not know their names, calling them usually by numbers, as is customary where the laborers are foreigners.

Vittorio was lying on his back, writhing from a bullet-wound in his side, while his two comrades, Fazio and Mario, were fighting desperately with a dozen of the laborers.

The air was full of Italian objurgations, and it was evident that the newcomers were nearly frantic with rage.

Diamond Dick did not wait to see what would be the end of the battle, but, calmly picking up one of the bags of money, slipped out of the door without being observed.

"Hully chee! Wot's dis?" asked Billy Doo, meeting Dick at the top of the staircase.

"Wow! Whut's ther row about?" roared Handsome Harry, who was by the side of Billy. "Whar hev yer been, Dick?"

"Go in there and get the remainder of this money, while I take this over to Crutcher's," replied Dick hurriedly.

"Thar ain't no need," broke in the voice of Mrs. Crutcher. "Me an' Simon will pack it over. Hyar, you Simon, whar air yer?"

"Hyar I am, Matilda," replied Simon meekly, as he came swiftly up the stairs.

"Yes, an' you've still got on them second-best pants, although I tole yer ter git 'em off an' put on ther ol' ones," snapped Mrs. Crutcher. "Come hyar!"

She took the bag of coin away from Dick and put it in Simon's arms.

"Git over wi' thet an' stay thar an' watch it. I'll be over wi' some more in a jiffy," she told him sternly.

Simon was only too glad to get away, and he obeyed his spouse without a moment's hesitation, while she took another bag from Billy, who had just come out of the maelstrom of fighting men in the room with it, without any of the Italians noticing him.

The fact was that the men were so infuriated at the treachery of Vittorio, Mario and Fazio, in taking the spoils and leaving them in the lurch, that they had actually lost sight of the origin of the trouble, and were letting the bags of money leave the room without paying any attention.

"Here, Leander, you take one," ordered Dick, as a colored man, the watchman who should have been in the shack up in the mountain, at One Man Gorge, and whose name was Leander Johnson, appeared.

Leander took the bag and hurried away with it, and now that the money was safe, Dick determined to round up the raging laborers in the big room before they killed each other.

"Wow! They've laid out ther hull three o' 'em," shouted Handsome Harry, as revolver in hand, he stepped inside the room with Billy Doo and Diamond Dick.

Dick had already possessed himself of his six-shooter, which had been thrown carelessly upon one of the mattresses by Vittorio, and now the three pards stood at the head of the room, ready to let drive at any of the Italians if it should seem to be necessary.

But it was not necessary.

Vittorio, Mario and Fazio all lay, stone dead, each with a dozen stiletto wounds to tell what had killed him, while Vittorio, in addition, carried a bullet in his chest.

The work of vengeance had been complete, and then Dick's voice rang through the room, in Italian:

"Everybody, hands up!"

Somewhat to his astonishment, the hands of every man in the room, some of them still grasping their poniards, went up by the sides of their heads, as they looked questioningly at him.

"Hully chee! Youse hez dem dagos goin' fer fair, Dick! It's a cinch dat youse kin squelch a foreign riot at a woid," observed Billy Doo, as he noted how completely the assemblage had yielded to Dick's command.

One of the Italians, whose name Dick did not know, but whom he recognized as a laborer employed by the railroad, asked permission to speak, in a humble tone.

"Go ahead," was Dick's response.

"Signor Diamond Dick, we surrender," began the man, in Italian. "We were led away by Vittorio, Mario and Fazio, and we are sorry for it. They were traitors to us. We will work for you peaceably, or we will leave Pocomo if you say so. We ask pardon."

Every other Italian in the room nodded in acquiescence as they listened to their spokesman, and Dick reflected for a few moments, saying at last, also in Italian:

"Men, I will trust you! Get up to One Man Gorge at daylight, and help to clear away the wreck of that train. I will be there to see how you do it."

With this, Dick made a sign to his two pards, and all three went down the stairs and out to the street, where the sweet breath of early morning was in strong contrast to the fetid atmosphere of the big room in which tragedy had just held awful sway.

"Air yer goin' ter trust them dagos, after all, Dick," asked Handsome Harry dubiously.

"Most certainly, Sarpint," replied Dick. "They are not bad fellows at heart, and I am not afraid that they will break loose again. They got under the influence of those three dead rascals, but I don't think they will have anything to do with the Black Hand again, or that we shall ever be troubled with an anarchist plot at Pocomo."

THE END.

One of those tales of mystery, with touches of the supernatural, which are always fascinating, will be the next in the "Diamond Dick" series. Its title is "Diamond Dick's White Mystery; or, The Crooked Man of Devil's Gate." It will be published next week, as No. 559. Who the "Crooked Man" was, and what the "White Mystery" turned out to be, will be watched for with breathless interest, as it is developed in the course of this brilliant romance. Diamond Dick, with his pards, had all to do with unraveling the tangled skein of strange doings and plots, and the whole scene is in the romantic environment of the great mountains that watch over the silent plains in the Great Southwest. You will find No. 559 a capital story, and it will be a question with most readers whether 558 or 559 is the better of the two. They are totally unlike, and that may make it more difficult to judge. The author has his own opinion, but he will not tell what it is. He prefers to have the verdict of his thousands of young friends to whom he talks in print every week.



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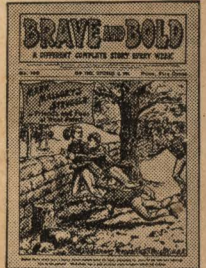
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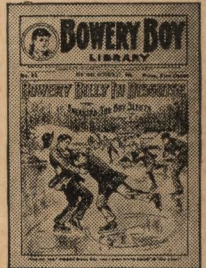
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